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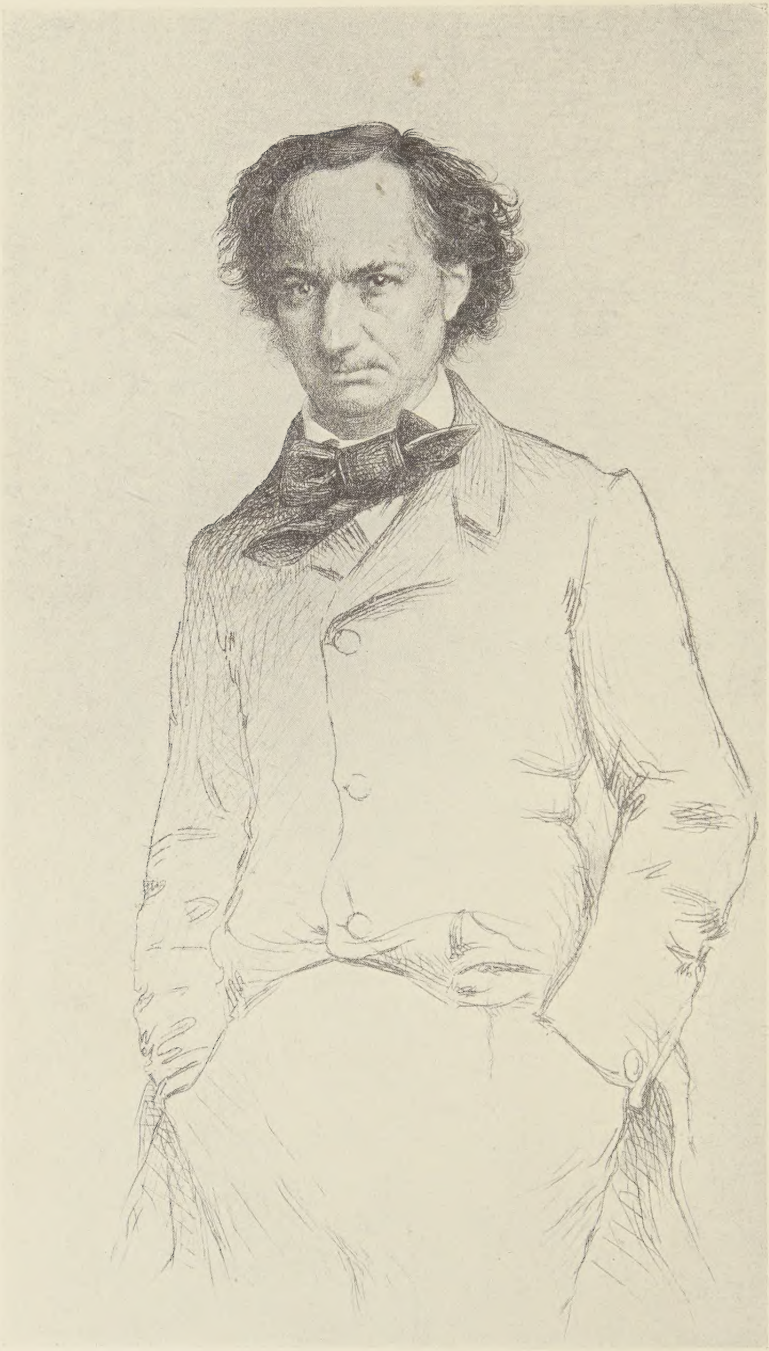
CHARLES BAUDELAIRE



CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

after the etching by Favier which serves as frontispiece to *Les Fleurs du Mal* in the edition published by Louis Conard

[*frontispiece*

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

by

FRANÇOIS PORCHÉ

Translated by

JOHN MAVIN

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1928
West

NEW YORK

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1928

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DEDICATION

The French Original is dedicated to

M. Jacques Crépet

And to the memory of his father,

Eugène Crépet,

whose exhaustive researches into the facts of Baudelaire's career are the necessary foundation for any biography of the poet.

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PART ONE

Le poète apparaît en ce monde ennuyé . . .

CHAPTER ONE

A Man of a Bygone Time

. . . Vois se pencher les défuntes années
Sur les balcons du ciel, en robes surannées . . .

CHARLES Baudelaire was a Parisian by birth. He was born on April 9th, 1821, at No. 13 in the narrow rue Hautefeuille, a turreted house which has since been pulled down to make way for the Boulevard Saint-Germain. It was there, in the neighbourhood of the École de Médecine, that his first years were spent.

There is always, and for everybody, a particular charm associated with the memories of early childhood, but how much intenser, how heart-rending it becomes, when the happiness of that far-off time is emphasised by present suffering ! The poet would often describe to his friends the walks he used to go with his father in the Luxembourg Gardens when he was about five years old. His father had white frizzled hair and eyebrows " black as ebony," as they used to say then. There was something peculiar about such eyebrows in that refined, worn face, as startling as a vulgar expression in a polite conversation. But a child does not criticize his parent's features, for him they are a part of the

eternal scheme of things ; and if, in 1826, little Charles had been old enough to reason about his impressions, he would certainly have blamed other white-haired men for breaking the rule by not having black eyebrows like his father.

To the passers-by the father must have seemed more like a grandfather taking his grandson for a walk, for François Baudelaire had, in fact, been born (at Neuville-au-Pont, near Sainte-Menehould) during the reign of the Pompadour and the minister Choiseul, that is to say, in the year of grace 1759. He had married first in 1803 and been widowed in 1814. Five years later, possessing a certain fortune which had come to him with his deceased wife, he married again, this time a penniless orphan, the daughter of an officer, Mlle. Caroline Archimbault-Dufays, a Parisian, thirty-four years younger than himself.

We must not allow the respectability of husband and wife to disguise the true nature of the case ; such a disproportionate match was almost monstrous. It was from the incongruous mating of a graceful and lively girl of twenty-six with an old man of sixty that the poet was born.

Probably the child was unaware of his father's first marriage, and, indeed, he would not have understood such a situation, but when a tall young law-student came on visits to the house and called him " brother " he was faced with an irritating mystery. The word, he felt, was only half true. By more than one token it was clear that *his* mother could not also be Claude's mother. From all that we know of the poet's nervous, susceptible, fretful disposition, and from the constant dislike he always showed when grown-up for his half-brother, we can imagine what reflections he must have made as a child upon Claude's unexpected appearance in the rue Hautefeuille. It may have happened that the young student in speaking of his stepmother, said " mother," and that little Charles, at such an obviously intolerable familiarity, burst out crying and was

carried away by Mariette, the maid. Or perhaps Claude sometimes called the young lady "Madame," and this sudden ceremonious tone struck the child as comical; nor would the redoubled friendliness to Claude with which Mme. Baudelaire shyly tried to cover the momentary embarrassment have seemed at all genuine to the little boy.

But what happened when Claude spoke to M. Baudelaire, who really was his father? It would suddenly seem as if they had exchanged parts, as if the son had become the father and vice versa. Claude would speak with a hint of coldness, almost of reproach, and the old man would pretend not to notice it. The white hair round his forehead was like a halo of kindliness, but the black brows would be contracted as he turned towards Charles, pirouetting on his heels, and with his wrinkled hand stroked the little boy's curly brown hair. Claude, in silence, would take a few steps backwards and forwards once or twice between the fireplace and the sofa and then politely take his leave.

So in the atmosphere in which Charles grew up, divergences of feeling, passions, hatreds even, did not exclude good manners. I imagine that the poet's mother, as we know her from her letters, used endlessly to repeat such remarks as: "We must try to smooth things out." But this attitude, which, more than the politeness due to her education, was in Mme. Baudelaire an indication of a timid, conciliatory nature, was cultivated by M. Baudelaire as a question of form. For it must not be forgotten that he was, compared with his second wife, a figure from another age.

And so when, on sunny days, father and child went for a stroll together on the terraces of the Luxembourg, simply through his father the future poet was in touch with a distant epoch. With his hot little hand clasped in those knotted fingers he could, without any intermediary, passing over the reign of Louis XVIII and the Empire, over the Consulate and the Directory, the Great Revolution and the

whole reign of Louis XVI, directly rejoin a vanished world, charming, old-fashioned, and remote like the sound of a spinet. For François Baudelaire was born shortly after the battle of Rosbach, when Voltaire was still at Délices and before Rousseau had published either the *Contrat social*, or *Émile*, or the *Nouvelle Héloïse*. This fixes the man's style for us, and even enables us to point out a mistake with regard to the son which was made by his contemporaries and has been continually republished in our time.

All those who met Baudelaire were struck by his meticulous politeness. In the literary bohemian society in which he generally moved, this courtesy must have seemed like a pose, the more so as just previously, in the time of romanticism, the fashion among artists had been rather the opposite extreme—an extreme of negligence, even of studied negligence, and of the " scarlet waistcoat." [1] Dandyism was only a reaction against bad manners. Baudelaire was no doubt one of those who took pleasure in defining this attitude, in making it more precise, but at the same time it was admirably in keeping with the earliest tendency he had received from his father. Dandyism was the continuation of the politeness of the past, it was after all simply the most recent expression of decorum. In the taverns of 1845, some turn of phrase of Baudelaire's that his rowdy, backgammon-playing companions took for an affectation of britishism, for anglomania, was often only a manner of speech from Old France, so long fallen into disuse that, in Paris, it sounded foreign.

François, the poet's father, came of a family of farmers, but probably his parents were fairly well-to-do, since he had been sufficiently well-educated, at a seminary, to be given the post of tutor in the family of the Duc de Choiseul-Praslin.

[1] Gautier had worn one at the first night of *Hernani* to proclaim his attachment to romantic principles.

It will be remembered that there was about the middle of last century a Choiseul-Praslin, a peer of the realm, who murdered his wife. Later on, when the poet's obituary notice was being composed, his mother, always timorous and, like the good French bourgeois she was, imbued with the importance of what people will say, became alarmed at the thought that the duke who had committed the murder might be mistaken for the pupil of Charles's father. She emphasised the fact that it was the father of this horrible duke, and not the blood-thirsty man himself, who had been tutored by M. François Baudelaire.

It was through living with the Choiseul-Praslins that the poet's father learnt the art of salutation, the art of driving-off street curs in a dignified way with his tall cane, and other old-fashioned manners which always remained in his son's memory.

Having been born in the provinces where traditions are perpetuated longer than in Paris, we ourselves, though not very old, can remember that our father, when out walking, used to drive off the dogs with surprising dignity and that when he met people of our acquaintance whom he considered to be of his own standing, he would salute them in a manner that would appear most extraordinary to-day. Whilst they were still some four or five yards away he inclined his whole body and, in a loud voice, addressed by name the person to whom he wished to show his respect, then proudly drew himself up and passed on, smiling. Sometimes, even, during this manoeuvre, unconsciously imitating the easy grace of an old-time aristocrat, he, a little bourgeois, would give his walking-stick, or rather his cane, as he used to call it, a twirl.

During the time he was a tutor, François Baudelaire had known Condorcet and Cabanis and been a friend of Ramey, the sculptor, and of the two Naigeons, who were painters. He himself used to draw in crayon and dabbled pleasantly

enough in water-colour, and when the Revolution broke out made use of his talents to give drawing-lessons, sharing his earnings with his old patrons, who were impoverished. And further, it seems likely that as he had connections with those in power, it was he who succeeded in saving the Praslins' wealth from confiscation. But it has not been proved, as his widow claimed, that he procured Condorcet the poison that saved him from the guillotine. Perhaps, in M. Baudelaire's repertory, anecdotes of the Terror provided an emotional background that he did not hesitate to touch up, that is, to heighten a little, for the pleasure of feeling the wife whom he regarded as a child shudder in his arms. It may be that, as he did not enjoy in her eyes the advantage of youth, the old husband compensated himself for this misfortune by painting himself as a hero.

However, if we cannot affirm it to be strictly true that M. Baudelaire during the Terror spent his days and nights running from prison to prison to help his friends, it is quite possible that he gave proof of his courage in other circumstances which, though no record of them remains, are not on that account negligible. We must not belittle this gallant man, for it should be remembered that, since any initiative in those troubled times soon became compromising, a kind of tragic greatness, unsuspected sometimes by the actors themselves, attached to the slightest gesture.

I expect that, in 1826, during their walks in the Luxembourg, the old man used to show his son the palace, and say : " I have known the time when that was a prison." And he would point out to him the part of the garden where a rope had once been stretched beyond which the public was not allowed to go. All along this barrier the most harrowing scenes were repeated every day when, from a distance, weeping relatives made signs to the victims of the Tribunal. Tired of these outbursts, the authorities set the rope farther back, so far back, indeed, that only those prisoners who

had glasses could distinguish the features of those they loved.

It was in this same palace of the Luxembourg, which had become under the Consulate the seat of the conservative Senate, that M. Baudelaire had led for forty years the peaceful existence of a bureaucrat who is in favour with his superiors and respected by his subordinates. For the Praslins, restored to their property and their influence, and, what is a rarer miracle, not forgetful of the past, had in 1801 obtained for their old family tutor a substantial position in the administration of the Upper Chamber.

This had been the brilliant period in François Baudelaire's career. He had a salary of about 10,000 francs (roughly 60,000 francs to-day), and in addition a pleasant house which stood in its own garden, not far from one of the gates of the Luxembourg on the rue Vaugirard side. The second Mme. Baudelaire, Charles's mother, used to come there to dine when she was a child, with her guardian and his daughters, for she was an orphan, as I have said, and was brought up by the Perignons, a family of lawyers. At this time the first Mme. Baudelaire, who had brought her husband a comfortable fortune [1] (country properties at Ternes and at Neuilly), was still alive. Yet the amiable man with those thick black eyebrows, then nearing his fifties, who had, his intimate friends used to say, the unaffectedness and good-nature of La Fontaine, must often in spite of himself have let his glance rest on this little girl who was so fond of playing in the Luxembourg Gardens with her friends when no one else was there, after retreat had been sounded.

At other times, M. Baudelaire would go out to Auteuil, M. Perignon's country home. He used to arrive in a carriage with armorial bearings, followed by a lackey with powdered hair in gold-braided livery who, as was then the custom, stood behind his chair at dinner to wait on him.

[1] Half of which the poet was to inherit on his father's death.

Caroline was naturally dazzled by all this. It was only later that she learnt, from M. Baudelaire himself, that the arms on the carriage were those of the Senate and that the servant was an usher put at his disposal, like the carriage, for the execution of official duties ; but this was when he had no longer anything to hide, when, that is, he was free to joke about all this magnificence that had so successfully achieved the intended effect.

On the fall of the Empire, François Baudelaire tendered his resignation with dignity, or, as he was perhaps on the point of being dismissed, with perspicacity. In any case, he was granted a handsome pension and was able to return to his crayons and brushes. From that day he officially, with some complacency, styled himself " painter."

It was then, his wife having died, that he married the ward of his friend Perignon, the artless Caroline, and it is worth noting that the sixty-year-old suitor had at first, either from prudence or sophistication, proposed jokingly. One can imagine the chaffing that went on under the trees at Auteuil, but behind the bantering smile there was the glow of senile passion, and then, suddenly, a serious proposal. M. Baudelaire was, indeed, pure eighteenth-century.

CHAPTER TWO

A Season in Paradise

Mais le vert paradis des amours enfantines . . .

IT WAS February 1827. In the turreted house in the rue Hautefeuille, in the high-ceilinged drawing-room, a few visitors were waiting, whispering together. Over the Louis XV fireplace the pier-glass was draped with a white sheet, and the chandelier was shrouded in muslin. M. Baudelaire had died and was to be buried next day.

But where was Charles at this dismal time ? We do not know. Perhaps at Auteuil with the Perignons, where he would stay until all the ceremonies were over. Perhaps at home, in the depths of the house, with Mariette, who would leave him each time the bell rang to go and answer the door, while he sat, turning over the pages of his scrap-books and listening to the new sounds that filled the house. It is difficult to say if he was unhappy. Charles had been very fond of his father, but he was only six years old. All the traditional and tender stupidities that, in a home like this, are in such circumstances proffered to a child of his age had, you may be sure, already been told him by his mother, weeping dutifully, and by Mariette, busy and sacerdotal. His father was in heaven, and yet, contradiction, enigma, he must pray for his father.

Meanwhile, scarcely had the old man with the " jealous " eyebrows disappeared, when in this child of his old age that passionate ardour, that sensual way of loving that he had transmitted to him, burst out, and Charles fell in love with his mother. And this must be understood clearly, for it was not simply a question of affection, of tenderness. The little boy was by this time almost seven years old, but I have not forgotten his age nor am I writing to scandalize people :

I assert nothing that was not later explicitly confessed by the poet.

Besides, such cases are not unusual, especially when the mother is young and coquettish, and Mme. Baudelaire was only thirty years old and black must have been becoming to her.

In the rue Hautefeuille, Charles was living alone with two women, his mother and his nurse. Mariette looked after him, washed him, brushed his hair, grumbling all the time as faithful servants will. But the child was not taken in by her scolding ways. He realized this woman's " dog-like devotion " to Mme. Baudelaire and himself, and he knew that she would " go through fire " for them. But Mariette came from the country. She was rough, and her coaxing, like her linen, was harsh to the touch. Certainly " she kept herself decent " (another of her mistress's expressions), but the fresh water with which she swilled herself was without scent, whereas his mother moved in a cloud of perfume. When she leaned towards her little boy, it was as though a window had suddenly been opened on to a garden. Her nails shone like agate, and her hands, so different from Mariette's rough ones, seemed to weave continually around her darling son a network of caresses.

In the evening, when Mariette had put Charles to bed, when he had said his prayers and snuggled down under the soft eiderdown, it would have seemed that he could have needed nothing more before going to sleep. Yet open-eyed he would wait for her whose presence was indispensable if he was to enjoy his well-being to the full, if to a comfort so usual that he did not even notice it, was to be added a sweetness which, though it too was a habit, was always new. He was waiting for his mother's kiss. And then after all the good-nights, there was still that movement when she stooped to shake up his pillow or turn back the blanket a little, the

movement that refined and coloured all material things as delicately as emotions.

All children are pleased that their mothers should be well-dressed, and by no means so much from vanity, vanity only comes later, as from an aesthetic emotion that is quite egotistical and disinterested, that is to say, personal to the child and heedless of the opinion of others. It is for his own sake that the child delights in his mother's clothes, just as the ardent lover does in his mistress's. And even more so. For to a sensual child, the caress of satin, the tinkling of jewels, the strong odour of furs, are so many discoveries ; and more than thirty years afterwards the poet still remembered with emotion the shock of pleasure these sensations had given him.

When we speak of a child's love, we are deceived by the word " child " : in reality nothing is less childish. It is the loves of grown-up people that are very often childish, or infected with a number of elements foreign to love itself. The child has an individuality of its own, but is quite without any social personality, so that passionate love exists in him, as it were, in its pure state ; and to this obsessive emotion nothing is of any account but its immediate object, which engrosses the whole soul.

Such was Charles's love. Whatever sorrow or loss he may have felt at his father's death, cannot, in his heart of hearts, have failed to be masked by the great happiness which suddenly enfolded him. From now on his mother belonged to him alone. This wealth of affectionate vivacity, this sweet-smelling hair, this warm, soft bosom, all this was his own.

In 1861, when he is forty years old, the poet will remind his mother of those days, and say, " Those, for me, were the happy times." Happy times, though they were a period of

mourning and widowhood, for during that widowhood the child was supreme.

First in the rue Hautefeuille and then in the Place Saint-André-des-Arts where Mme. Baudelaire found simpler apartments, no doubt at a lower rent, Charles used to spend the lamp-lit evening hours looking at picture-books. With his chin on his two clasped fists he could dream endlessly over the tiny black and white landscapes where his eyes perceived, beyond the windmills, a vast horizon. He loved maps, too ; the outlines of the continents, the great blue stretches of the sea. What voyages he made like that, without stirring ! But would he have experienced these pleasures of imagination unless they had been steeped in a greater, deeper happiness ; intimacy, alone with his mother who embroidered or drew (for Madame Baudelaire, charming woman, drew in pen-and-ink), sitting thoughtful by his side ? In the same way, would a man who is working beside a dear companion take the same pleasure in his task without the closeness of that living presence, that mingles with his in the atmosphere of the room ?

Indeed, there are not two ways of truly loving, one for children and one for grown-ups. For Charles, his mother is " at once an idol and a friend." Every outing was an adventure, every drive a holiday-treat.

And then the visits they used to make ! If many of them were boring, others were amusing and sometimes even extraordinary, like the one to Mme. Panckoucke, in the rue des Poitevins. A silent house in a mossy courtyard, with grass growing between the stones. And, inside, a Chinese drawing-room, which Goethe himself had remarked upon to Eckermann, for Mme. Panckoucke knew him and had translated some of his poems. But the friend of this Olympian adored children. Baudelaire always remembered his astonishment at the secret room where she used to keep for such occasions a heap of toys, from which her young visitors

might choose. There were still fairy-godmothers in the world !

But yet in the midst of this blissful existence, in the magical whirl of this new life, the highly strung child would be pierced suddenly with a pang of pain : an indescribable feeling of exclusion, or a suspicion that every moment of happiness was something stolen. Returning with his mother from these lover's escapades through the streets of Paris, he used to notice (he said later) how sad the deserted quais looked in the evening.

But these were only flashes, the first distant, fascinating gleams of that lurid world, which one day was to claim him for its prey. Only for a moment was his ecstasy interrupted.

One summer in particular, when Mme. Baudelaire rented in the country, that is to say at Neuilly, " a white house, small but peaceful," the rapture became more intense. In the little garden there were plaster casts of a Pomona and a Venus ; in the windows serge curtains that were lit up by the setting sun. And the meals were long drawn out and silent. But love, passionate love, that feeds on the presence of the loved one and needs nothing more for its complete satisfaction, filled the days.

In this little house in the suburbs, even more than in Paris, Charles had his mother to himself. This remote, confined dwelling differed in no way from that which a jealous lover chooses for his mistress, to imprison her and himself with her. This exile that he shared, this delightful captivity, was in every way comparable with the solitude in which two people violently in love entrance one another, forgetful of the rest of the world ; even " the warm-hearted servant " was there, obedient to the slightest order of this secret happiness, for Mariette was with them, always at hand, treading noiselessly in her felt slippers, like a beneficent Fate.

CHAPTER THREE

The First Taste of Hell

C'est l'ennui ! . . .
Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat . . .

IN THE same way that happiness had unexpectedly overtaken Charles, a dreadful catastrophe broke over his life. Was it his mother's death ? No, but there were moments now when in his fury the child would have preferred her to be dead. The peace of that small white house snuggling in the trees of Neuilly, the peace of that lovers' retreat, was nothing but a fraud. And who was it that had organized this fraud and kept it up all those weeks, or months even, but the beloved herself ?

So during all those happy meals, her thoughts had been elsewhere, and all those outings of which her companion had not at first taken heed, had had an unacknowledged, detestable purpose. Charles suffered for the first time, and in his suffering the bitterness of malice and the fevers of jealousy were combined with the yearnings of regret. It was like the pain from a poisoned wound.

His mother had betrayed him. She was going to marry again. And however impossible this disaster may have seemed, yet it happened. The marriage took place in November, 1828. Everything was over. Joy, that plenitude glimpsed for a moment, disappeared for ever from Baudelaire's life. Understand me clearly : for ever. This was the moment in his destiny, and how early it had come, when an ominous bird like Poe's raven flapped its wings and said : " Nevermore ! "

Charles's mother noticed nothing of this flood of suffering she had let loose. Caroline was in everything innocence itself. She was only thirty-one. Ought she at this age to

have sacrificed herself in order to devote herself solely to her son ? He believed so, and he continued to say so all his life. His judgment on this point never changed, any more than the incurable bitterness of his reproaches.

It might be believed, from the reason he gave for his reproaches, that they were dictated by pride, by the consciousness the poet had always had of his own exceptional value : " When you have a son like me, you don't marry again." But this was only apparently the reason, though Baudelaire himself perhaps believed in it. The most exasperated pride could in itself by no means account for the tone of suffering with which he always referred to his mother's second marriage : to me, it sounds like the cry of a betrayed lover.

Yet of Caroline's two marriages it was the first that had been the " marriage of reason " in all its horror, a horror which this naive woman does not seem to have felt ; the second was quite another matter. This time husband and wife were, in regard to age, well matched. Her new husband was thirty-nine years old and a fine man. But at the same time it turned out that this match was even more advantageous than the other, just what parents call an unexpected bit of luck. Think of it ! M. Aupick was a brilliant soldier, in command of a battalion, already a Knight of Saint-Louis, and Officer of the Legion of Honour, and for six years he had been aide-de-camp to the Prince of Hohenlohe. Obviously there was passion at the bottom of it. Once again Caroline had known how to please. And I imagine that at the very moment when the child of her first marriage, flung down from such heights, was furiously ruminating his vexation, she herself was not only well satisfied, but flattered and a little intoxicated.

What kind of man was Major Aupick then ? Quite a perfect man, as they say ; a brave soldier, a self-made man, capable of disinterestedness and of love (as he proved). He

was rather stiff, it is true, and did not trifle with discipline ; a little heavy, too, and rather magniloquent, as may be gathered from his choice of a coat-of-arms—*Azur, a sword or in pale* ; with the motto " *Tout par Elle.*"

Towards his wife's son, who was not an expense to him, as the child had an independent fortune, he showed himself well-disposed, and fatherly in his own soldierly way. Charles, at first, lowered his eyes under his clear direct glance. He did what his mother, the traitress, ordered him, and called his stepfather " dear." The word is terrible in its hypocrisy, in its assumed submissiveness, when one remembers that it hides a frightful hatred. But manners must come before everything.

Charles submitted to the law of the stronger, the law which parents, guardians, and in general all grown-up people in authority, use towards children, in their interest, as they say, and as is often true, but the children cannot understand that.

A few years after his marriage, in 1832, Major Aupick was promoted Lieutenant-Colonel and posted to Lyons. Only too happy to spare his wife and, indeed, though secondarily, his son also, the menace of cholera, which was then raging in the capital, he hurried with his family to join his new garrison.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau called Paris " that town of mud and smoke." But what can be said of Lyons ? Whoever has breathed, if only for a few hours on a winter's day, whilst waiting for a train, the mists of the Saône and the Rhône that mingle in the sullen streets of this city, will realize that it is at least a curious fact, that he who, of all poets, has described most powerfully the depressing, maddening boredom that fog causes, lived in Lyons for four years, and that at the age when impressions are usually most keen, from eleven to fifteen.

At the time when Lieutenant-Colonel Aupick and his family arrived by coach in the old silk town, the streets were still vibrating from a serious uprising, the "hunger rebellion of 1831" which had taken as its emblem a black flag, bearing this inscription, still so sensible and courageous in its distress: "Live and Work, or Die Fighting!"

Indeed at this period, popular risings, echoes of which I catch in the poet's work, succeeded each other at short intervals. In July 1830, in Paris, Charles, then nine years old, must certainly have heard for three days the distant sound of rifle-fire.

Where was his stepfather at the time? At Algiers, where he had just taken part in the capture of the Kazbah. But the little boy had not been able to take advantage of this desertion, as he must have thought it. In the first place, his stepfather was only away for a short time, and besides, his disappointment was too recent. Intimacy with his mother, even when she was alone, was no longer what it used to be. To complete his unhappiness, when Charles reached Lyons, Mariette was dead; and it was in the care of a strange nurse or of one of his father's orderlies that after vespers on Sunday he used to climb the slopes of Fourvières, through the yellow fog, passing through the silk-weavers' quarter, the Gourguillon, and the Faubourg Saint-Georges, and coming back by the Croix-Rousse. These were dismal walks, during which the child would have seen nothing but scenes of the most glaring poverty; steep ascents lined with filthy hovels, where damp oozed all along the walls, where no sunlight ever reached. Inside these tumbledown buildings he caught sight of low, filthily dirty rooms. In the repose of these Sunday afternoons the looms were silent as if exhausted, out of breath. In a niche at a street-corner a statue of the Virgin expressed in its smoke-grimed face the resignation which was the weaver's state of mind in 1832,

after they had been driven back to their hovels by heavy rifle-fire.

Presently Charles was sent to the Delorme boarding-school and then, in 1833, as a boarder to the Collège Royale. Why should he have gone there as a boarder when his family was living in the town ? Had he become a burden, then, to the treacherous mother whom he so bitterly loved ? No, only he himself in his secret irritation, which as time went on was aggravated rather than appeased, could imagine such baseness. But naturally, since the cult of discipline, as we have seen, was so important in the eyes of M. Aupick, Charles's apprenticeship to it was the first thing to be considered in his scheme of education.

Far from wishing to get rid of his stepson, he was only too keen on hardening him. It was most important (as he pointed out to his wife, who cried a little and acquiesced) that Charles should be awakened at half-past five by the beat of the drum. Whereupon, he must wash his hands, covered with chilblains, under a tap of freezing water. As to his lower extremities, once a fortnight was enough, in warm water it is true, in a tub slippery with grease : foot washing by squads, right-turn, quick-march ! I have been through it all myself. The boy must get accustomed to working before dawn ; that is to say, his eyes swollen with sleep, his nose stuffed up from a chronic cold in the head, he must go staggering downstairs from dormitory to class-room, and there on an empty stomach, breakfast not being until half-past seven, struggle more or less successfully against the longing to go to sleep again, his head bowed over his lessons. Above all it was important that this sly, rebellious, capricious little boy should be taken away from his mother, who was too indulgent to his faults, too submissive to his whims. Good heavens ! Let him be ragged if necessary. If a boy is obstinate, ragging does him good, whatever people may say.

In short, Charles was privileged to enjoy all the benefits of the Napoleonic university system, such as it dispensed to its chosen sons, the boys of the middle-classes. To be a boarder at Angoulême, where I was, was rough enough, but fancy being a boarder at Lyons, and in 1832 besides, when the public-school was even closer to its model, the barracks ! How far-off the times of Neuilly were !

In a letter which the schoolboy wrote in 1833, to his half-brother, who by now was a deputy-magistrate, he informs him, as a piece of astonishing news, that soon all the shops of the town " are going to be lighted with gas." So, at that date, the Collège Royale was still lighted with oil-lamps, whose dim yellow glare must have shed a miserable light in the murk of Lyons. It was in a stench of smoking lamps that Charles composed his Latin verse, a task he rather enjoyed, and did those drawings from antique statues which were skilful enough to gain him, on one occasion, a first prize,—the only one he ever had.

In the same letter, which in romantic fashion he signed *Carlos* (it was three years after the battle over *Hernani*), his grating irony is already apparent. " What. Theodore " (his sister-in-law's brother, for Claude was married), " Theodore has won prizes but not Charles ! *Ventre-saint-gris !* See if I don't get some." And already too, his violence : " This letter is swinishly scrawled."

So the months dragged on in an oppressive melancholy from which the only distractions were the sullen quarrels with the masters, the fights with other boys in the quadrangle, or the news, brought in by the day-boys, of some sudden overflowing of the Rhône.

Two of his old school friends state that Baudelaire, at this period, gave the impression of being a bit " cracked," for he was very keen on reciting, in the break, poetry by Hugo or Lamartine. Mystical and cynical by turns, he was in any case unique, standing out from the rest of the boys, those

clumsy young provincials, by some indefinable refinement and distinction ; a legacy from Paris, a recrudescence of his father's manner.

In 1834 a series of events occurred more tragic than the almost annual disaster of the floods : like a fire smouldering in damp hay, the rioting round about the Croix-Rousse suddenly, in the mists and rain of April, burst into flame. To tell the truth, since 1831, with the damp atmosphere of Lyons another had been mingled, a scorching one that was not indicated by the barometer ; the atmosphere of revolution. The root of the trouble was still the old dispute between the manufacturers and mill-hands, but this time politics were mixed up in it : the insurrection had leaders, Godefroi Cavaignac and Garnier-Pagès who had come from Paris on purpose and organized groups : the Society of the Rights of Man, Saint-Simonians and Mutualists, that were swarming with Mazzini's *carbonari*.

The street fighting was terrible, and it went on for five days. All this time there were necessarily no lessons at the Collège Royale, as the teachers and day-boys could not leave their homes ; whilst in playground, dormitory, and classroom, the boarders, listening for the noises of the outside world, heard, in the direction of the Place Saint-Jean, the rattle of firing.

Baudelaire remembered the crowds he had caught sight of on those first walks through Lyons, away in those wretched hill-side streets ; the rags swarming with vermin, the running sores, those faces and bodies of the damned. Doubtless as the son of a bourgeois, himself a bourgeois since he enjoyed the advantages of a privileged education, such suffering was not his affair, and he may even have looked upon it as ordained. But these rioters, of whom he was a little afraid, were people who wanted to break their chains, and he too was in chains. They were sick of their slavery, and he himself. . . . He began to dream. O

dreams ! Temptations of the Devil ! Is there anything imagination will stop at ? Colonel Aupick was in the thick of it, advancing fearlessly at the head of his men, conspicuous by his epaulets. If only some good shot would catch sight of him. O Neuilly, those days at Neuilly !

By the evening of the thirteenth of April the rising was suppressed and Colonel Aupick was still alive.

CHAPTER FOUR

Defiance and its Penalties

Aux objets répugnants nous trouvons des appas . . .

BUT IT did not end at that, for the rigour with which he had acted throughout this affair (he hit hard on such occasions) won for Lieutenant-Colonel Aupick a place among those selected for preferment, and he was shortly promoted to Colonel. But his other promotions had been gained on more honourable battlefields : the capture of Algiers, which I have mentioned, and before that, in Austria, in Spain, in the French campaign and at Waterloo. In 1836 the gallant officer was appointed to the staff of the Governor of Paris.

When Charles, fifteen years old, returned to his own town, he found it changed. The huge plaster elephant had disappeared from the Place de la Bastille and a column then three-quarters built, was being put up in its place to commemorate the heroes of the July rising. The Arc de Triomphe at the Étoile, concealed by scaffolding for many years as work on it had been suspended, was at last finished. The church of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette was completed too. On the top of the Vendôme column, a Napoleon in cut-away coat, with the traditional *petit chapeau* on his head, had replaced the huge fleur-de-lis of the Restoration period. This same year, in the Place de la Concorde, an obelisk from Egypt was to be unveiled and was even then standing there, in line with the Madeleine, still covered with a tarpaulin.

But, above all, the first omnibuses which had been put on the streets in 1828 had increased in numbers, opening up new and unforeseen communications between those isolated provinces, self-engrossed and conservative of their customs, which the different districts of Paris had been up till that time.

There are some things, though, that never change, and it was these, which anyone else would not even have noticed, that the boy greeted like old friends. Instead of the dense fog of Lyons, there was that Paris mist, so fine even in winter, and in spring translucent ; and, in the sky, those masses of clouds which continued the outline of the buildings as though, in the architect's mind, they had formed two complementary parts of the same plan. In Baudelaire, who was, like Boileau, a poet of Paris, the same symmetry is to be found beneath the covering of imagery, in that deepest part of the work inherent in the mentality of the craftsman, and independent of the subject-matter : in the composition.

The colonel, who now found it necessary to entertain a lot, and to cut a figure, set up house in solid bourgeois style in the Marais district, rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine. Charles was sent to Louis-le-Grand.

M. Aupick, who was neither a fool nor a monster, had not failed to notice his stepson's precocious intelligence, and he still had confidence in him. When he introduced Charles to the headmaster, he said : " I am making you a present, Sir. This is a pupil who will do honour to your school." The expectations the colonel had were of a purely scholastic kind, and were at first to some extent fulfilled. For in 1837 at the general examination, Baudelaire won the second prize for Latin verse in the second class and was sixth in Latin translation.

But the following year things went wrong. An old friend from Lyons who had passed into the École Normale, came to see Baudelaire in the visitors' room at Louis-le-Grand, and found him embittered and rebellious. Another schoolfellow, whom we shall meet again later on, Louis Ménard, the future author of *Rêveries d'un païen mystique*, speaks of the quiet contempt which Baudelaire showed for the college

staff, and one can see the poet's attitude in this, in keeping with his already formed nature.

Of the poet, I said, for indeed he already deserved this title. Émile Deschanel, another friend of Baudelaire's at Louis-le-Grand and his form-mate, tells us how they used to exchange extempore *bouts-rimés* in the mathematics lecture. Deschanel's improvisations were, no doubt, *bouts-rimés*, but to judge by the fragments his friend published later, Baudelaire did not improvise ; he was only writing down lines which had been matured and finished for a long time, lines in which he is already thoroughly sure of himself.

We are not at present writing a work of criticism, but if the biography of a writer is to be anything more than the useless exhibition of a shadow, we cannot leave out of account the workings of his mind, from which he derives the very material of his life. It is essential to realize that this schoolboy, though he may have been undisciplined, was so only because he had a discipline of his own in his mind. It was not simply because of his old grudge and repressed hatred that this seventeen year old schoolboy, whom M. Aupick often found intolerable, took up the attitude of an equal towards his stepfather, loaded with gold lace and decorations, assumed that insolent reserve that a colonel could not decently allow in a youngster who was not even old enough for a recruit ; but it was because he had in himself a secret power, and was aware of it.

In his early poems he drew his inspiration, it is admitted, from *Joseph Delorme*, but even then this public schoolboy, sulkily preparing for his matric., added to Sainte-Beuve's inharmonious verse a fullness that it had never had :

> Sur ces monts où le vent efface tout vestige. . .

Such was the beginning of the poem he brought back in 1838 from a visit to the Pyrenees that he made during the holidays with his parents.

But in October, the beginning of term came round again and, whether he wanted to or not, he had to go back to Louis-le-Grand. His insubordination now set such a terrible example to the other boys that in 1839 he was expelled. The headmaster wrote to inform M. Aupick.

Imagine the effect of this news falling in the rue Saint-Catherine one evening between the game of whist and the bedtime pipe : " O ! so my stepson is going to play up, is he ? " the colonel thought to himself. And we know what " playing up " means to the soldier : something terrible, bringing in its wake a whole apparatus of repression. We have a way of putting a stop to that !

Caroline wept. These tears are not the last she will shed for this son whom she loves, and who, too, she feels in the way women do feel these things, in spite of his incomprehensible temperament, loves her passionately still. Her husband wanted to use strong measures at once. Insubordination disconcerted the soldier even more than it infuriated him, and in his gloomy rage he went as far as to talk about " the reformatory." How horrible ! She pleaded and he wavered, for he loved her, everyone loved her. She obtained a reprieve.

Charles, suitably admonished and at bottom a little ashamed of an expulsion whose importance he exaggerated himself (for he was still only a boy), was sent to live with his philosophy tutor.

In August he matriculated, and he owed his success, it has been said, to an understanding with the housekeeper of one of the examiners—but he may have invented this story later to astonish people. He made haste to announce his success, without mentioning the housekeeper, to M. Aupick, who had gone to Bourbonne-les-Bains to take the waters for certain complications set up in an old wound. The colonel, on his side, had in the same week been appointed *maréchal-de-camp* (brigadier-general). Caroline must have

taken advantage of this double triumph to " smooth things over." There were mutual congratulations and peace seemed restored in the family.

His schooldays finished, the young student had to decide upon a career. The general had a leaning towards diplomacy : " he had dreams of a golden future for Charles." The elegance of this phrase with its old-fashioned, boarding-school flavour would identify it as Caroline's, whose indeed it is. M. Aupick had " friends at court," which one might have realized from the way his own affairs went, and wanted his son to benefit by them, for as I said, he had a good heart. He was " a friend of the Duc d'Orleans," which is the sort of thing that counts ! It was Caroline who made this assertion, perhaps, out of harmless vanity, exaggerating a little.

But at first Charles only replied to the most insistent entreaties to make up his mind, with an inexplicable silence, until driven with his back to the wall, he declared that he wanted to devote himself to literature, to write books, to be an author ; in Caroline's words : " to fly with his own wings." The general was dumbfounded.

Even to-day, in middle-class circles, I do not think that a literary career appears an entirely safe one to parents who are anxious about their children's future. But in the '40's such an idea gravely, coldly, expressed by a youth of nineteen, in a drawing-room in the Marais, in front of the gilt candlesticks over the fireplace and the bronze and tortoise-shell clock, must have seemed like a mad freak, an insult to common sense, one of those eccentricities, which if they are not restrained, result in the ruin and dishonour of the family.

A vehement discussion followed between the two men, who for the first time were face to face without masks. Perhaps in the middle of this outburst, M. Aupick, so full

of probity and rectitude was surprised by a certain biting, sneering tone, that suddenly revealed to him a feeling towards himself that he had never suspected. Between her husband and her child, Caroline was like a willow swayed in the storm. Once again she wept. But above all she felt obscurely, with a kind of horror, that in Charles's will there was something irreducible, a foundation of rock as it were, upon which henceforward all her remonstrances and even her tenderness must break.

When the two adversaries parted, without either having yielded an inch, they had both been wounded. But at any-rate the general and his wife could congratulate themselves that fortunately for Charles his inheritance was not for the moment under his own control, and M. Aupick still cherished the hope that between now and his majority the rebellious boy would come round to a more reasonable point of view.

However, let loose now in the streets of Paris, freed from any supervision, and with complete leisure to indulge in that idling which he, and he alone, knew to be productive, the boy preluded his independent life with a series of escapades, among other things, with dissipation, the all-important thing at that age, into which he rushed.

The epitaph which he composed for himself dates from this period :

> Ci-gît qui pour avoir par trop aimé les gaupes
> Descendit jeune encore au royaume des taupes.[1]

Whatever allowance one may make for mere joking, which in any case would be bad taste here, such a witticism is very significant. There is, in particular, one point which for our part we shall not be afraid to deal with frankly, since in our view it is of the first importance. In a letter from Baudelaire to his mother (1861), we find this statement : " *When I was very young* " (the italics are mine) " I had a

[1] Here lies one whose excessive fondness for whores
Precipitated him into an early grave.

venereal complaint." It seems then, that this misfortune, which had such disastrous effects on the poet's life and in the end perhaps hastened his death, should be placed in the period of his first excesses (1839-41).

In his own mind Baudelaire does not seem to have taken the first manifestation of this disease very tragically, though he always considered it to be serious and never neglected it. Possibly it was upon this occasion that he composed his mocking epitaph.

In any case it is evident that in the boy's choice, the most elementary prudence was overridden by his taste for the fantastic. What was it that he was already seeking, in certain kinds of degradation ? Perhaps the bitter taste of sin. We must not forget that he had received a religious education : his mother was devout and even the general " used to go to mass."

By this I do not mean to maintain that " religious " people are the worst debauchees ; but belief and morality are two different things. Certainly faith is often combined with moral discipline, the one sustaining the other, strengthening and exalting it : but on the other hand I have known enough of the " faithful " and enough unbelievers, to be able to assert that the most sincere religion, the most exact as to its observances and rites, does not always go hand in hand with virtue, just as virtue may very well exist outside of any religion. And further, I have known many militant Catholics for whom the confusion of faith and morality, or rather the insistence on moral considerations rather than on purely doctrinal questions, appears a heresy, the very mistake that is at the bottom of Protestantism. Myself a Catholic, I imagine that there is nothing more objectionable to my brothers, I mean to those who observe their religion and freely subscribe to doctrine, than the good man who has no religion, what is called the " lay-saint." Indeed, I believe that they prefer the most depraved individual, so

long as he repents of his sins on his knees. Nothing is more logical, for that matter. To accuse oneself before God is still a way of professing one's faith ; to think of one's faults as sins is implicitly to pay homage to the sovereign Judge whose pardon one hopes to have. Every lapse provides the sinner with a fresh opportunity of realising his imperfection, the imperfection of the human race, and of humbling himself before God. But, once weakness and vice have been given the importance of an ineradicable taint, this canonical significance which transcends all morality, may there not be danger that certain warped natures will come to cultivate their vices and almost to revere them ? In Russia, a corresponding aberration of Christian feeling is not uncommon among the orthodox ; it explains Rasputin.

But was Baudelaire really corrupt ? At twenty corruption is hardly ever more than display, made out of bravado. Certainly he had never been quite free from a kind of cold-blooded, irritating boasting which he had displayed even as a child. (You will remember his *Ventre saint-gris !*) But principally, I think, this cynic was sexually timid, and only possessed of his full vitality with women of the lowest sort :

> Une nuit que j'étais près d'une affreuse juive,
> Comme, au long d'un cadavre, un cadavre étendu . . .[1]

This woman Sarah, whom the poet familiarly called Louchette, is to be found in another poem, a youthful one that is not included in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, although at least part of it deserves to be. There is much that is extravagant in these lines, the romantic truculence of Petrus Borel, yet in spite of the displeasing rhetoric, there is also a note of sincerity, of profundity, a mixture of sarcasm and pity ; in a word, something of Baudelaire.

For the boy continued his self-questioning, and worked in his own way, which was not by any means the way

[1] One night as I lay by a horrible Jewess,
Like a corpse stretched out beside a corpse. . . .

General Aupick and his loving mother could have wished. They began to be seriously alarmed, the more so that Charles was extravagant. His taste for low women did not prevent his being " dressed like an under-secretary at the British Embassy " ; a comparison we owe to Le Vavasseur, one of his friends at this time, who had known him at the Pension Bailly, in the Place de l'Estrapade. Another of these " pals of the Quarter," Prarond, remembered Baudelaire carrying a " light, gold-knobbed cane," which perhaps had belonged to his father.

This young elegant impressed all these more or less bohemian youths as being a *young man of property*, as indeed he was. I underline the expression, for it is of essential importance. One or two among the better-bred of these gay companions were sometimes invited to the rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine, and amongst them Le Vavasseur, with whom Baudelaire went to watch the march-past on the occasion of the homecoming of Napoleon's ashes, in December 1840. By her preferential treatment of those of her son's friends who seemed the most genteel, the well-meaning Mme. Aupick hoped to confine Charles's companionship to the group she picked out. Most parents share the same illusion. But Baudelaire preferred the cafés of the Left Bank to the hospitality of his home. He was almost always away from the house, or else, if he attended the general's receptions (the latter had just been appointed commandant of the Staff College), he had a way of making himself unpleasant by his continual sneering. M. Aupick frowned. Caroline trembled. In a word, for some months a fresh storm had been gathering.

This storm burst one day during a full-dress dinner. The general had roundly rebuked the young man for some unseemly remark. There was a dead silence all round the table, and Baudelaire, humiliated, got up pale with rage, and still, even in the wildest fury, polite, said to his step-

father : " Sir, you have been extremely rude. You deserve to be chastized and I shall have the honour of throttling you."

The formality with which the threat was expressed added something insanely deliberate to it, which must have stupefied the guests and, indeed, the general himself, who was in full uniform. Already the madman was making as if to fling himself on M. Aupick when the latter slapped his face, and Baudelaire collapsed among the over-turned chairs in a nervous fit.

Detention followed immediately, and then a council of war, that is to say a family council. It sat a few days later, in the absence of the culprit, who was under close arrest in his room.

It was decided that Charles, who was still a minor, should be sent away from Paris for a time. The council (probably François Baudelaire's pupil, the Duc de Choiseul-Praslin, was a member, as he had taken part in the last one, summoned on the death of the old man) authorized a loan of 5,000 francs [1] to cover the expenses of the journey.

A punishment, certainly, but, to the minds of these good people, a last attempt to separate the young man from his " bad companions," and, as they hoped, to change his views. Perhaps in Mme. Aupick's heart the sadness of parting was tempered by this last consideration.

Outwardly, at least, Charles submitted ; as a convict submits, marching between two warders. He was despatched to Bordeaux by stage coach (one of the last) and on June 9th, 1841, the *Paquebot des mers du Sud*, with Baudelaire on board and commanded by Captain Saliz, weighed anchor and set sail for Calcutta.

[1] All figures should be multiplied by six to give an equivalent sum for the present time—but as to equivalent value see below, p. 55.

CHAPTER FIVE

Under Cloudless Skies

Une île paresseuse où la nature donne
Des arbres singuliers et des fruits savoureux.

LATER on the poet used to tell the most singular stories about this exile, naïvely forgetful that drinking companions are the least credulous people in the world. He used to say that having been signed on as an apprentice, he suffered the most terrible treatment while on board. Then he would add: "You know the sort of habits sailors have? . . ." Whereat there would be silence, followed by a smile, as you can imagine. Sure of having produced his effect, he would continue: "At that time I was rather delicate-looking, slim and elegant as a woman. . . . The brutes used to press round me so. Often I had to defend myself. . . ." The reality was more commonplace and remained on the whole, even in this disciplinary voyage, comfortably middle-class. M. Aupick was fond of ships. He had been born in the little port of Gravelines and was one of those infantrymen who, in their hearts, are sorry that they have not joined the navy. So he, too, was capable of dreaming! But dreams that were confined to ships,—to sailing ships, of course, for in 1841 there were scarcely any others. Dreams which were, in a way, practical, since with them went a knowledge of sailing-gear. In short he had entrusted his undisciplined stepson, with a thousand warnings and recommendations, to a certified skipper, probably a native of his own district, a thoroughly trustworthy man.

In representing Captain Saliz as a gaoler, Baudelaire did not foresee that we should one day possess irrefutable information about this person—and about himself; nothing

less indeed than the report that this scrupulous man sent to General Aupick from the Ile Bourbon. However, if, as he asserted, Baudelaire was completely assured that he would occupy an important place in French literature after his death, he ought to have been on his guard, realizing that the slightest incident in his life would become the subject of closest research. Was he not, then, so sure in his own mind of the future as he claimed to be ?

But we must not exaggerate his crime. Spinning yarns at a café is not throwing dust in the eyes of posterity. Perhaps Baudelaire only wanted to humbug a set of fools. But then we must admit that too often the poet took those about him for fools. This shows such a disagreeable attitude that, unless we were on our guard, it would sometimes prevent our being fair to him.

The packet was one of those trading vessels that take on board a few passengers. On this voyage they were chiefly merchants, colonial army officers, and this Parisian, this young man of property whose passage had been duly paid before embarcation in good golden louis. The captain also took with him his son who, being of the same age as Charles, they thought would be company for the exile during the voyage.

As may be seen, there was nothing inhuman about all this, but on the contrary, consideration, attentiveness, a full understanding on all sides of the responsibilities entailed and even more, for the very man who considered himself bound to be most strict felt in his heart that the culprit was at the same time someone of value.

Among other instructions the captain had received orders (orders from above) to read a lecture now and then to this chance ward, whom a frightened family had sent away from the capital. Truly, the parents' forbearance was only equalled by their candour, but one cannot help smiling a little at this honest general who, not knowing

how to deal with a poet, handed him over to an old sea-dog.

The latter, when he received M. Aupick's letter at Bordeaux, followed by this tall, slim young man, must have cursed under his breath, I imagine. Now in addition to his cargo he was to have charge of a soul. But how was he to get out of it ? It was impossible. He received Charles very politely and showed him to his cabin. And since politeness was Charles's first principle, that and his determination to write poetry being for the moment his only certain fortune, they at once understood each other perfectly.

It was not until they were at sea that any disagreement took place. Then one day during a spell of fine weather, in fulfilment of his peculiar charge, the captain undertook to point out to this well-bred boy, of whom he was not a little frightened, that literature and poetry and that sort of thing were all very fine, but were not a career.

What had this strange mentor to say in support of his thesis ? Banalities ? But he was not quite so stupid as you might think. His report, which is well written, is that of a simple but not a stupid mind. His remarks with regard to Baudelaire himself show perspicacity. The attractiveness and the peculiar gifts of the boy did not escape him. Inwardly Baudelaire may have been amused at the honest fellow's arguments, but he did not openly make fun of them. He contented himself with repeating each sentence with friendly, obstinate, exasperating mildness. In the end the captain was sweating blood : handling his ship in a storm had never cost him such labours.

But what did Charles himself think of his position ? When he found himself on the deck of this three-master, dropping down the Portuguese coast, disputing with an old sailor his right to devote himself to poetry, did the situation appear to him in all its comical absurdity ? What was taking place in his innermost self ?

The irritation in his soul was appeased. Already at Creil where, for a few days, he had had to wait in a *pension de famille* that had been chosen for him, while the last preparations for his departure were being concluded, he had written to his mother in words that bear the stamp of repentance and are almost a formal apology: "Persuade him if you can, that I am not an absolute scoundrel but a good chap." Yet, if he regretted his outburst on account of the worry it had caused his mother and, also, because of the ridicule it covered him with, he was none the less unshaken in his resolution, and the thought that in nine months he would be of age, made him accept the adventure with patience.

But as always he kept a watch on himself. So sincere in the depths of his being, he appeared to be affected, and his affectation was, like his poetic form, studied, though not so effective. Besides, had he now departed from his assumed attitude, from his air of martyrdom, he would have seemed to be giving in, and this his pride would not permit him to do, nor, he thought, his honesty, for then he might have aroused hopes that later would be disappointed. And further the only advantage that this voyage brought him, and which, though he was too intelligent not to be aware of it, he appreciated but poorly, was that it enabled him to view, through his sulkiness, new horizons and to lay in a stock of images for the future. The only thing was, he must be left free to dream. But on a ship space is restricted. It was not the crew that bothered him; they, on the contrary, were part of the scenery like the great swelling sails, and provided material for his reveries. But his cabin-mates, those colonial merchants, those army men (more soldiers!) were deadly boring. Boring, too, the captain's son, whom they had intended to be a companion for him, a heavy lout, a candidate for some Naval College who, to the despair and humiliation of his father, talked

of nothing but the new method of navigation, of steam, that is.

Against all these bores Baudelaire employed his usual method of defence. At the meals taken in common, where a gay and friendly conversation, that is to say, a mixture of bad puns and dirty stories, was the rule, he maintained at first a disapproving silence ; then, in his cutting voice, he calmly pronounced the most scandalous aphorisms on the family, on patriotism, and on religion. In short, he did just what was necessary to make himself obnoxious to everybody, except to that excellent man Captain Saliz, who was only pained to see a young man of such mettle, so well-read and well-mannered, persist in his mistaken views. Soon all the passengers began to shun this dangerous young man like the plague. For that matter, perhaps it would have been wise if Baudelaire had had a separate place kept for him at meals, although before leaving he must have laid in a supply of mercury pills.

The ship, having put in at the Cape Verde Islands to take in fresh water, was now running south all the time, and on nearing the Equator the heat became overpowering.

There was no such thing as comfort at this period, it must be remembered ; the passengers' accommodation hardly differed from the sailors'. There was no privacy in the dining-saloon, which was also used as the smoke-room ; nor in the lavatories, nor in the cabins swarming with black-beetles, where, in groups of ten, the passengers stifled in the foul atmosphere. The food was all salted or heavily flavoured with garlic to disguise the taste of rotten meat, but there was good wine, Médoc, excellent strong tobacco, first-class coffee and fine rum. None the less, for anyone fastidious, the ordeal was physically a hard one.

But there were sometimes astonishing encounters : as, for instance, when the crew caught a porpoise from which

the ship's cook saved a tit-bit to improve the usual fare. Or when one afternoon the captain shot an albatross that was circling around the masts. The bird, hoisted above the hammocks, was only winged, and they tied a rope to one leg and for some days kept it prisoner on the bridge. It was a magnificent creature, with a span of not less than twelve feet. The sailors used to tease it and annoy it for the pleasure of seeing it get tied up with its long wings when it walked, at which everyone, with the exception of Baudelaire, would rock with laughter. At last they killed it, and the cook made a dish of it for the day they crossed the line, a traditional occasion for merry-making.

Less than two weeks after these festivities the air began to freshen, for it was the end of July, a winter month in the southern hemisphere. A winter extraordinarily mild, with nights so fine that the impression they produce is too deep for joy and overflows into sadness, as if it alone were vast enough to contain it. The Southern Cross, inconceivably huge, burns above the horizon. The foam is phosphorescent.

But in the latitude of the Cape of Good Hope the vessel was struck by a terrible storm : " such an experience," says the captain in his report, " as I have never been through in all my long life as a sailor." For five days and nights the vessel positively wallowed in the water. The cabins were flooded. The passengers shivered and moaned.

Baudelaire, in these terrible circumstances, maintained his politeness, which, on occasion, was more than a pose —an attitude of spiritual resolution. Captain Saliz, who knew something about bravery, pays homage to the boy's calmness. One mast was broken and carried away part of the rigging.

At last the hurricane died down, the weather became fine again and, on September 1st, after a passage of eighty-three

days, the disabled ship entered the roads of Port-Louis (Mauritius).

This island, conquered by the English in 1810, had been assigned to England in 1815. It had then resumed its old name of Mauritius given to it, formerly, by the Dutch; but it had belonged to France for many years under the name of the Ile de France, which is still the one in use among the planters there, of whom almost all the families were originally French. A general fact that Baudelaire must have noticed is the extent to which the manners of the past are perpetuated in our one-time colonies; and among the creoles he again met with the bows and old-fashioned courtesies of his father.

It has been pointed out as a further affectation the poet must be charged with, that when, some time after this, he wished to present a poem to a lady of Mauritius by whom he had been entertained, he should write to her husband: "As it is only right, proper and polite that a poem addressed to a lady by a young man should pass through the hands of her husband before she receives it, I am sending it to you so that you may only show it to her if you think fit." To M. Autard de Bragard, to whom the letter was written, such behaviour would have seemed mere natural politeness, and François Baudelaire would have said, "One could not do otherwise." But we have become so boorish that we no longer understand these niceties in the least and they irritate us in those rare characters who have preserved the manner and the key to them.

In this bay of the old Grand-Port, where the brigantines of La Bourdonnais, the store-ships of Suffren, the frigates and sloops of Surcouf, had so many times victoriously resisted the great three-deckers of the Union Jack; upon Cape Malheureux, where the *Saint Géran* was shipwrecked; in the Jardin du Roi under the tall palms; in the old church

of Saint-François-de-Pamplemousses, where Virginie used to go to Mass, everything belonged to the old France—not brought back to life but preserved intact in the perfumes that the poet now breathed. An old France, however, very different from the flower-gardens of Paris and the gloomy Lyons streets, a far-away time with the strange savour of exotic fruits.

Whilst the damage to the ship was being made good, the passengers landed and lodged in the only hotel in the town. Baudelaire, furious at not being able to escape their company, which was more persistent than that other torment, the mosquitoes, remained obstinately unsociable. He had no intercourse in Port-Louis except with the Bragards and their friends, and with one or two local men-of-letters, belated disciples of the Abbé Delille, whom he soon tired of.

Besides all this, he found the climate trying. What would he have felt then in the torrid months, December and January? But there was something almost too delicious in the atmosphere, which affected the nerves of the young man, ill as he was, rather in the same way that an Eastern sweetmeat might affect a weak digestion. He could not have said at what moment this suavity, which had at first overcome his ill-humour, and enraptured him, had treacherously turned to a deadly melancholy.

His senses continued to function in spite of himself, his memory recorded impressions which in his agony of mind he did not even notice; the sea-green of the mangroves, the indigo sky above the sugar-cane plantations, or the raucous chattering of some fire-plumed bird. Hindoo coolies drew water from the springs. Negresses went by, a coloured loin-cloth draped about their swaying hips. But this picture did not excite him any more than a sweating peasant woman would have done, coming back from harvest along a country road in France.

Captain Saliz, however, in spite of the supervision which kept him down at the docks where the repairs to his vessel were being hurried forward, did not lose sight of his charge. He was worried by Baudelaire's despondency. Having observed in every latitude the various forms that homesickness takes, he knew that this time the trouble from which the young man was suffering was not a pretence, but something that had overpowered his will.

The good man became frightened. Was not homesickness sometimes fatal? A final discussion took place between him and Baudelaire. Baudelaire refused to go any farther. If the captain, he said, refused to give him back the amount necessary to pay his fare home (the captain had received a deposit of 3200 francs from M. Aupick) he would find some employment in Mauritius (no doubt as tutor in a French family) in order to earn enough to pay his passage. After a long and always polite argument, the captain managed to persuade the young man to go as far as the Ile Bourbon with him, promising that, if he persisted in his determination, every facility would then be given him to return to France.

And to imagine that the general had, perhaps, entertained the hope that his stepson, at the sight of this traffic of the sea, would become interested in commerce, in colonial trade! That this unsociable being would thus find his happiness far from Paris. But no, that would have been to expect too much! That part of the programme was not even mentioned.

Baudelaire's stay in Mauritius lasted less than three weeks, from 1st to 19th September, and at the Ile Bourbon, in the Saint-Denis roads, only a few days longer. But, as he afterwards confided to Leconte de Lisle, he did not once go on shore. Was this real lassitude, or a stratagem intended to impress the guardian responsible for him? However that may have been, the poet refused, flatly this

time, to take any notice of the scenery ; he did not care to know anything about it.

On the 17th or 18th of October, the *Paquebot des mers du Sud*, under Captain Saliz, continued its voyage to Bengal, without Baudelaire, who had gone on board the *Alcide*, after the instructions concerning him had been handed over to Captain Judet de Beauséjour. A few days later the *Alcide* weighed anchor for Bordeaux.

The poet was back in Paris in the early days of February 1842, exactly nine months after his departure. Naturally, at a time when semaphore (usually reserved in any case for official communications) was still the only kind of telegraphy in use, no warning had preceded Baudelaire in the rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine. So he arrived unexpectedly. His mother must have been delighted to see him, but it would not appear that the general killed the fatted calf for him.

PART TWO

Ma jeunesse ne fut qu'un ténébreux orage
Traversé çà et là par de brillants soleils . . .

CHAPTER ONE
The Prodigal Son

Le poète est semblable au prince des nuées.

FORESIGHT is praised as a virtue, but when, except by chance, have man's anticipations ever proved correct? Not only do our most reasonable actions sometimes lead to the most disastrous results, but if some of the most serious people were called together and asked to weigh a certain question, though their deliberations might be as full of commonsense as they were themselves, a commonsense which would even be reflected in the decision they came to, yet its consequences would escape them and might turn out to be of the most fantastic kind.

Baudelaire, as a result of the violent attempt that had been made to dissuade him from it, returned to Paris all the more fixed in his determination to devote himself entirely to literature. It was as though his resolution had hardened in exile and solitude at the same time as his physical strength had been increased by this deviation which had not lacked some hardships. The youth had become a man and the transformation had been brought about to the advantage

of the very vocation they had wanted to turn him from, so in this respect the family council had suffered a complete defeat.

But this voyage, which M. Aupick had been the first to suggest and which had been unanimously approved by most sensible people, had an even more unforeseen result. For the only memory that Baudelaire brought back with him, at least the only one that for the moment haunted him, and sometimes even tormented him, was that of a negress whom he had seen flogged in Mauritius. At the time, the scene had rather disgusted him. She had been sentenced for some petty theft and the punishment was administered in public by a planter, for slavery had only been abolished in the island in 1834 and the old ways still survived. Now all the details of the scene came back to his mind, and its grotesqueness was mingled with cruelty and the cruelty with indecency. From this complex mixture a belated and barren lust, as insistent as a neuralgic pain, was born.

This, obviously, had not been among the general's intentions, any more than another thing for which, this time, he deserves our thanks: the enrichment of French poetry that was soon to ensue when all those tropical scenes with which his stepson had stored his memory whilst in the Indies, against his will but through the general's action, began to revive.

On April 9th, 1842, the poet came of age, and by June of the same year the rupture with his family was complete.

When his legal authority expired, the general, always punctilious, had himself insisted on settling up accounts with his stepson, for whom he acted as trustee. The property, which till then had been held jointly by Charles and his stepbrother Claude, a magistrate at Fontainebleau, was now split up, and since Charles, as one can imagine, was in

a hurry to obtain his share of the inheritance in ready money, part of the estate at Neuilly was sold.

But as M. Jacques Crépet has judiciously pointed out, Claude kept the remainder and did well by it, as in 1852, there were already strong signs, if not of that headlong rush, at least of an edging towards the west which was one day to result in Neuilly being merged in the capital. The land which, in 1803, had constituted the dowry of Claude's mother (whose maiden name was Janin) increased in value to an extent which made her son's fortune when she herself was already quite forgotten.

So Charles came into possession of about 75,000 francs. According to M. Marion, professor at the Collège de France, this number must be multiplied by six to get the approximate value of this sum to-day, say 450,000 francs. And this fact does much to help us to get a clear notion of the poet's position during this period of his life. He was indeed, it cannot be repeated too often, a man of property. This being so, it is easy to imagine what his comrades' attitude towards him must have been in this respect. If Baudelaire had been socially ambitious, this fortune would have made the early stages of his career easier. In the literary circles among which, out of a horror for drawing-rooms, he took up his quarters, it put him at a disadvantage. On this point the opinion of bohemian circles is much the same to-day. For them the possession of money always seems to be surrounded with a kind of shameful prestige, that is to say, whilst secretly envying it, they at the same time despise it. Baudelaire, even when his circumstances were severely reduced, could never succeed in completely modifying among his friends the impression he had made in 1842-43. Thus in the article that he wrote about the poet after his death, Banville, who had known Baudelaire at the outset, says that he "became poor after having been extremely rich."

Now, our friend Marcel Bouteron who, since he knows everything that has anything to do with Balzac, is acquainted with an infinitude of facts about matters of social economy during the first half of the nineteenth century, draws our attention to this fact, that, though the cost of living, as regards necessities, was, at the time of which we are speaking, relatively much lower than to-day, on the other hand every kind of luxury cost much more : or rather at that time there was no such thing as quasi-luxury, no standardization of luxury, and real luxury, which makes every object a sort of original edition, signed sometimes by the craftsman, was priceless. From this point of view, Baudelaire, who had so many tastes to satisfy, was scarcely as well off as a young man of to-day who has a fortune of 450,000 francs. At the same time there are some luxuries, such as having books bound, which to-day are almost an ostentation, which towards the middle of last century could have been covered by quite small sums. Baudelaire, even in his days of want, made a point of having his books bound.

The settling of accounts was quickly followed by his departure from his parents' house. Everything made this separation inevitable : the impatience which for a long time the poet had felt at submitting to the rules of a house where meals were at stated hours, where staying out late and sleeping in the morning was considered scandalous ; the gruff tone of the general, who seemed to bear a grudge against his stepson for the breakdown of his education ; and finally Madame Aupick's sighs and her mild, tearful eyes. The son, as a matter of fact, loved his mother in his own way and, if he resigned himself without much difficulty to torturing her for a motive which he judged the higher consideration, the necessity of following his vocation, at least did not wish, like the egoist he was, to be a spectator of suffering that would have made him suffer too. How-

ever, Baudelaire did not go away openly ; he fled, leaving a note for Madame Aupick.

There must have been a reason for this furtive escape. The poet has said somewhere, in a moment when sincerity got the better of his pride, that he had a real fear of his stepfather. No doubt the young man used to hold his own against the general ; had he not, indeed, gone so far as to insult him ? But, on that occasion even, his nerves had let him down. This breakdown had left him with a sense of physical humiliation and the fear of a similar collapse, in the same way that a soldier who has once experienced fear, I mean, has not been able to overcome it, dreads its return, knowing that there is, physically, a flaw in his will.

In escaping like a thief, perhaps Baudelaire wished to spare himself the sight of his mother's tears. More than anything, he feared a certain cry which he had heard already the preceding year, the faint, muffled cry of a breaking heart. Certainly, he would not have let that affect him, there was never any doubt about that. For what would have been the use of adding to a universal, almost abstract remorse, the particular, concrete remorse which in the mind is associated with such images ? It was better to clear out, one fine day. So this was what he did :

" I am going away, and shall only return when I am in a more seemly condition, both mentally and financially. I am going for several reasons. To begin with, I have sunk into a frightful lassitude and torpor, and I need a great deal of solitude to pull myself together and regather strength. Further, it is impossible to make myself what your husband would have me be ; consequently, it would be robbing him to live any longer in his house ; and finally, I do not think it *proper* that I should be treated by him as he seems to mean to treat me for the future. I shall probably be obliged to live hard, but I shall be better off. To-day or to-morrow

I shall send you a letter in which I will tell you which of my things I need and the place where they are to be sent. My decision is fixed, final and considered ; so it is not a matter of complaining about it, but of understanding it. B-D."

(When a young man the poet signed himself in this way—Baudelaire-Dufays.)

The bird, the albatross, has flown. Later, we may pity him, there will be no lack of opportunities, but, at the present moment, it is Caroline whom we should be sorry for. With what determination, what swift sureness, the blow was dealt !

There is, at times, something terrifying in the harshness of children to their parents, and in particular, in the harshness of sons to their mothers. It is not necessarily, however, a sign that they are unfeeling, as the case of Baudelaire proves. For what sensibility, indeed, was ever richer and keener than his ? Nor was it in this case one of those outbursts of ferocity which are not incompatible with affection, in certain natures. One meets with kindhearted people who are cruel ; but Baudelaire was not precisely what is called kindhearted, neither was he malevolent. At that moment, he was absorbed in the carrying out of his plan. It had to be done quickly. In his haste and confusion he cast aside all the prescribed forms. Why ? Perhaps because his feelings for her whom he was about to hurt went beyond any of the accepted expressions ; but since he was a writer, and was so sensitive, too, he should have been able to find sincere and feeling ones. Yet he did not even attempt to. He was in a hurry, he struck the blow and went off. Why ? Because he knew that he could strike this heart that he had just pierced and make it bleed, unendingly, without ever exhausting the love with which it was filled.

And the son was not mistaken. Caroline saw the note, in full view, on Charles's table. She read it and pressed one hand to her breast, grasping the back of a chair with the other to save herself from falling. The only reproach she breathed was a wordless sigh. She, too, in her turn, felt that she had been betrayed. Like a deserted mistress she suffered and worshipped. But there was this difference between her maternal sorrow and the agony Charles had suffered as a child—that in all her pain there was not the least shade of grievance.

CHAPTER TWO

To-morrow will do

Aujourd'hui l'espace est splendide.

BAUDELAIRE settled down in the Ile Saint-Louis, at number 10 quai de Béthune. This peaceful neighbourhood seemed to him particularly favourable to work.

To-day it is still one of the best preserved corners of old Paris. The atmosphere must have remained much as it was then, save for the noise from the Sully bridge at one end of the island and, beyond the two branches of the river, the bustle on the quais of the Hôtel-de-Ville and the Célestins, which, accompanied by the dull rumbling of the monstrous town, now surrounds even this oasis with its sounds and echoes. But, the tumult has reached such a pitch at other points that here it is comparatively quiet.

In 1842 the peace of the island was unbroken. The Sully bridge did not exist : there was nothing but foot-bridges. The Louis-Phillipe bridge was then a cable suspension bridge and beyond this, the Marie bridge and those of La Tournelle and La Cité, were toll-bridges, which must have further restricted communication between the island and outside, and isolated the inhabitants.

Faithful, to begin with, to his first vows (had he not sworn to subordinate everything to his work !) the poet rented a modest apartment, more modest indeed, than his income warranted. But the young man was full of good resolutions. It was necessary to be prudent, even economical. Middle-class economy, which is economy for its own sake, is sordid. But in this case it was ennobled by its end, which was to protect the work that was to be done. What a sensible argument ! M. Aupick himself could have found nothing there to quarrel with.

The apartment was one very high room on the ground floor. Surely the tenant was now contented with his lot ? Perhaps that was too much to ask, but he was at least sure of the future. The suffering that he had caused his mother was like an abscess that had had to be cut. Indeed this operation had been like a lancet wound from which the patient would presently benefit. Yes, his mother would one day, and that before long, be the first to thank him for having had the courage to cause her such pain.

And M. Aupick, how he would then regret his lack of understanding, his scorn ! What a proud revenge Baudelaire was so soon to take, next year perhaps ! This general all girt in his uniform, choked with his high collar, would, whatever he felt, when his son became famous, have to bow before him ; and it would not be long !

All these hopes, or rather all these certainties, so clearly a different thing from the happiness, the vast illumination of early days, were, one might say, like a stream of little rockets, dazzling, exciting, enthralling. And then, what a relief to be one's own master at last, as they say ; to be free. Free to dream, and, what was the essential thing, free to write ; but free, too, to go in and out when one pleased, to sleep all morning if one felt like it, and free to sleep out. Besides, the poet had such a great desire to work ! With such a resolute desire there was no danger in putting off acting on it till another day, since one was sure in advance of recovering it when one wished, unchanging as a principle. There was even something stimulating in this putting-off, like a slightly hypocritical, a slightly perverse, game.

So one lunched with friends at the *Tour d'argent* opposite, on the left bank, or at Duval's, the wine-merchant's in the Place de l'Odéon ; or in summer beyond the walls, at the *Moulin-de-Montsouris*, a good place unappreciated by the bourgeois, where there were arbours and trees, and a view which took in the whole of the Faubourg Saint-Jacques

and, beyond, the domes of the Val-de-Grâce and the Panthéon. While the serving-girls brought out jugs of wine under the trees, the pleasantness of the moment and one's gay surroundings were rendered all the more delightful by this being the last holiday one was going to allow oneself; and one could enjoy it with a clear conscience. And these small excesses were to be followed by greater ones, real ones, those of intense work.

But this was only known to oneself, one's friends never suspected it. They were idlers whose powers lay principally in talk. Whilst they were launching illusory schemes one watched them indulgently. Here were Prarond and Le Vavasseur, two old friends, the intimates of yesterday, or rather of the past, of the far-off time at the Pension Bailly, more than three years ago. Auguste Donzon had joined them, who had come up from his native Argonne to conquer Paris, and Jules Buisson too, fired with the same ambition. They were all poets, " rhymers " as they called themselves. The Normandy School was there complete; though it only included two Normans, that was enough to justify its name, for, in Paris, all the groups of provincials are in the same plight.

Baudelaire himself maintained his reserve; he sympathised with the group rather than belonged to it. He meditated, his gaze wandering over the valley of the Bièvre, towards Alfortville. What was he smiling at so enigmatically? At the immense labour that awaited him. All round him the table was in an uproar, sometimes angry (Casimir Delavigne was his pet aversion), sometimes deliriously enthusiastic (Gautier's *Comédie de la mort* was praised to the skies).

At dessert, Le Vavasseur recited his famous sonnet, his invective against Olympus:

Dieux joyeux, je vous hais; Jésus n'a jamais ri.[1]

[1] Joyous Gods, I hate you; Jesus never laughed.

These " Joyous Gods " did not particularly charm Baudelaire's ear. Yet he applauded the idea of the poem, which rather appealed to his own tastes, principally out of friendship it is true, but sincerely too, with certain reservations as to the workmanship. In his turn, he recited *la Petite Mendiante rousse*, and in his turn received a measure of applause, neither more nor less than his companions. But is it not always the same in gatherings of this kind ? One must be extraordinarily acute to pick out from such diverse company the brow marked by destiny. In the tobacco-smoke the faces are hardly distinguishable from one another, and in the same way, amongst all the noise, the poems destined to live are confused with those that will perish the same evening.

At night the band of friends would return along the rue de la Tombe-Isoire still reciting poetry, still hurling their hyperboles at the moon. And Baudelaire, a little exhausted, would think to himself " That's another day wasted, but to-morrow I shall set to ! "

Next day he would suddenly remember that he had made an appointment with his tailor that it was impossible to put off. He really did need a black swallow-tail coat.

He wanted one cut very full, so that it could hang open, though it might also be buttoned up. The waistcoat, of black kerseymere, cut fairly high, was to be made to his own design ; the trousers of fine cloth, not close-fitting, but rather baggy. Such was the suit he had thought out, every detail decided upon, after long consideration, for as everyone knows, cutters are only workmen : they can carry out orders, but without any imagination. Besides, this everyday dress was to be final, the same for all seasons of the year. Only the socks and shoes were to be varied : lace-up shoes and black socks in winter, and pumps and white socks in summer.

It was evidently a rather fashionable get-up, a little

dandified; especially as the black cravat was to be more like a scarf than a stock. Balzac and Roger de Beauvoir might imitate the Comte d'Orsay if they chose. Like Musset, who was then thirty-two and therefore an old fogey, but who had led the young men into the way they should go, Baudelaire had but one model, Byron's own master: Brummel.

As to the hat, a top-hat of course; but top-hat is too simple a word, it does not convey enough. The hat itself must also be thought out. And that was another thing! Either to-day, or to-morrow if the consultation with his tailor lasted too long, he must go along to Giverne's, the partner of the famous Gibus, in the rue de l'Ancienne Comédie, at the corner of the rue Saint-André-des-Arts, in the neighbourhood where he had spent his childhood, where he had been happy. He must give the hatter a pencil sketch to work on: the rim flat, the crown wide at the base and gently tapering towards the top. Giverne would understand, he was an intelligent man. Eugène Delacroix and Théophile Gautier dealt with him.

And then coming out of Giverne's after arranging about his hat, the idler suddenly remembered that he ought to go and say "Good-evening" to Banville who lived near by. The two poets had met at Louis Ménard's, Baudelaire's old schoolfellow at Louis-le-Grand.

Louis Ménard was another remarkable man. He had entered the École Normale, but left at the end of two months. Now, in his attic, he also was writing poetry, busy with a Prometheus Unbound. He was an enthusiastic hellenist, but at the same time a kind of alchemist and a collector of snakes. There was a cupboard in his room from which, when it was opened, there escaped an abominable stench: it was filled with bottles in which he kept lizards and adders in alcohol, finds that he had brought back

from his ramblings in the forest of Fontainebleau and which he used for his experiments.

But the Ménards and the Banvilles were men of a quite different stamp from the Praronds and the Le Vavasseurs, whom Baudelaire found really too simple and was beginning to grow tired of. He retained a ludicrous recollection of the other evening's festivities at the *Moulin de Montsouris*: it was not that he had degraded himself, which would have been insignificant or might even have been fascinating, but that he had been merely silly—the worst way of wasting one's time. Good-bye to the Normandy School! Let them triumph or perish now, but without Baudelaire! He was certainly quite right to go to Banville's this evening, if only for hygienic reasons, to wash himself clean of the "Normans."

No doubt, whilst he was going upstairs, there flashed in front of his eyes a picture of the white paper lying at home on his writing-table, and beside it, like a streak of fire, the satanic apparition of a crimson goose-quill, all ready trimmed. But—he was about to argue with himself again, to defend and exculpate himself afresh, when he found that he had rung the bell and that Banville, who had come to open the door himself, stood before him.

Baudelaire was young, but Banville was younger still. He was just nineteen, two years younger than Baudelaire. He had recently published his first book of verse, *les Cariatides*, which had been an immediate success. Baudelaire would say of Banville later, that he was the poet of happiness, and, in saying this, perhaps Baudelaire wished to imply that he, in contrast to his friend, was the poet of unhappiness. Baudelaire praised above everything else in Banville his sureness of execution. But Baudelaire's sureness of technique was no less unerring. Yet what a difference there is between these two kinds of sureness!

The one is easy, I mean easily gained, a gift as it were ; the other, even when every outward trace of effort has been eliminated, is the result of long labour, the reward of patient research.

How rich in significance was the contrast between the two young poets as they stood at the door ! Banville was still a boy, as he was always to be, childlike and inspired at once, a kind of innocent mythomaniac, congenitally incapable of seeing life as it is. Whilst the other was exactly the opposite, still a boy in years it is true, but already in part matured, like certain early fruits : already saddened by some unknown past experience, already old. And as for reality, that Baudelaire was to come to understand and to seize in such a grip that he would press out all its bitter juice.

At the actual moment when Baudelaire was shown by his friend into the presence of Madame de Banville the contrast between their two destinies was glaring. For Théodore, too, had a mother whom he cared for affectionately. But this mother encouraged her son's early efforts, and besides, success had come at the very outset ; a triumph in the best possible sense, as complete as one could dare to expect for a first volume of verse—the immediate respect of all literary men and, in the newspapers, one or two friendly reviews signed by well-known names. Baudelaire congratulated this young brother-poet. But the Banvilles were people of delicacy ; they had the exquisite tact to lower the key of their delight in the presence of their visitor. Yet in spite of their restraint an air of happiness pervaded this worthy home. Baudelaire was surrounded by it and breathed it in, without mean envy, but with a retiring into himself, an inward bitterness. Whilst he spoke, he thought of his own mother, from whom he lived shut-off, and his eyes filled with tears. Then, hiding his emotion behind polite phrases, he made up an excuse and

took himself off, like a younger son driven away by a turn of fortune that is not even an injustice.

And for two days after he was upset.

At last one morning he sat down at his table, with his paper before him, and had just taken up his pen, when there was a violent ring at the door. It was Deroy, the painter, to whom Baudelaire had, indeed, promised to go and sit for his portrait. So they set out together, but on the way the model, overcome with remorse, became worried at the thought of the number of sittings that would be necessary to finish the portrait satisfactorily.—Ten or twelve at the most.—Well, better say twelve, but, my dear Deroy, not one more ! I have an awful lot of work to do at present. O ! I know I write very quickly. Good God ! Of course I shall soon manage to make up the lost time.

But a few days later Baudelaire discovered that his room on the quai de Béthune was decidedly unpropitious for work. It was winter. The ground floor by the river was damp. On the January quarter-day he moved out and went to live in the rue Vaneau.

He had already given Deroy fifteen sittings, and the portrait was scarcely sketched in. The sitter was restless. Every sitting, after ten minutes or so, he would light a clay pipe, the painter would lay down his brushes, and they would spend the rest of the afternoon in conversation. A month and a half later the portrait was at last almost finished.

The picture, which we possess, represents a Baudelaire with narrow shoulders, delicate, feminine hands and long hair, the face framed by a short, youthful beard. But more expressive still, and more nearly drawn to the life, is a lithograph by Deroy (doubtless a preliminary study before the portrait was painted) in which we see the same spare, long-haired Baudelaire, but with a frowning, mephistophelean

face and, in the whole figure, something contracted, taut, galvanic.

Meanwhile the painter, before he could exhibit his canvas, needed a last sitting, but his model did not return. He had disappeared without warning, and Deroy had no news of him. The artist thought that his friend was for the time being engrossed in work, the mysterious work to which he was for ever alluding. For three weeks Deroy respected his retirement. Then one morning he ventured as far as the rue Vaneau where, to his great astonishment, the porter informed him that M. Baudelaire was hardly ever at home.

CHAPTER THREE

The Black Venus

Bizarre déité, brune comme les nuits . .

THERE was at this time on the left bank, in the Cloître Saint-Benoît, a little theatre called the Panthéon. There, as at the Luxembourg, the students' Bobino, and at the Saint-Marcel theatre, which was chiefly frequented by the tanners, they usually played vaudeville ; I mean real vaudeville, that is to say, comedy interspersed with songs.

One evening, after dining at the Café Tabourey in the Place de l'Odéon, in company with Edmond Ourliac and Gérard de Nerval (other acquaintances he had made at Ménard's) Baudelaire found himself alone towards eight o'clock. In those days dinner was early. Ourliac had had to hurry off to *la Presse* to hand in his copy, and as for Gérard, he had gone off abruptly as was his way, without saying anything, no one knew where. Perhaps ten minutes ago, peeling a peach, he had suddenly decided to set off for Germany that very evening.

Baudelaire, having nothing to do, wandered through the streets, turning over in his mind for the hundredth time a still imperfect line :

" Tristement sous son deuil, la chaste et maigre Elvire . . ."

" *Tristement* " was flat. . . . " *Frissonnant.* . . . " Yes ! that was better, " *frissonnant.*"

" Frissonnant sous son deuil, la chaste et maigre Elvire. . . . "

Presently he found himself in front of the Panthéon theatre. He stopped under the flaring gas lamp and read the placard, mechanically at first, without taking it in. Then a passer-by bumped into him, and he woke up and read : " *Le Système de mon Oncle.* Curtain-raiser in one act, with

songs. . . ." He smiled—such ineptness was not without its attractions for him—and went in.

The performance had begun. On the stage, facing the audience, a man and woman were singing a duet. There were a few faint encores, like yawns; then the little orchestra stopped and the action went on, with false gaiety, in ordinary dialogue.

Suddenly a lady's maid came on to the stage and spoke a few words. She was a mulatto. Baudelaire searched feverishly through his programme for the name of this strange apparition. He found it. Jeanne Duval. But why were his hands trembling? A funny idea (and not so stupid either) to get a coloured girl to play the general utility parts.

At any rate this one was not commonplace: tall, with an extremely thin body and broad, widely-set, shameless hips; the firm swelling of her breasts, which could be seen under her bodice, standing out clearly from her thin chest; something exaggerated in the lines of her body and in her movements, as it were a kind of undulation. And the head, was it ugly or beautiful? It was impossible to say; but there was about it, as about her body, something exorbitant: a dark complexion, yellow rather than black, a small, straight nose, only very slightly flattened towards the tip, and enormous eyes, "eyes like soup-plates"; and the hair, or rather mane, curling tightly in deep blue, terrible masses; hair that was alive with an independent life and which, done low on her neck in a huge clumsy chignon, fell on all sides, in spite of the hairpins, in furious wisps, like a writhing bunch of snakes.

In the interval the poet questioned an attendant. Mlle. Duval was a beginner. She had no part in the "big play." All she had to do during the whole evening was to speak those few words. Yes, one could go behind. Baudelaire might have gone, but his breeding was stronger than his impatience. Even with this negress, or rather especially

JEANNE DUVAL

from a drawing by BAUDELAIRE

(Reproduced from *Les Dessins de Baudelaire*, published by *La Nouvelle Revue Française*)

[*facing page 70*

with her, in that lay its piquancy, he would bow to the conventions : this evening he would only send a bouquet. There was a florist's in the theatre. With the flowers he sent a note, begging that to-morrow he might have the honour, etc. . . . Miserable, hypocritical formulas, when he felt that in his heart something savage had been let loose.

Baudelaire reached the rue Vaneau in a state bordering on agony. He was pursued by this creature's voice, with its sweetly hoarse inflections, bestially caressing. And it was the contrast of the slim waist with those insolent haunches, just that, which obsessed him in that picture he had brought back with him from Mauritius. It was this that he needed, that he desired, this that he could now have. And all his promises of assiduous work, his desire for fame quickly achieved and, in addition, remunerative, all that higher ideal for which he had broken with his family, how lightly they all weighed at this moment !

Jeanne was a native of San-Domingo. That is all we know of her origin, and even that is doubtful. But what does it matter ? It is better thus. Whence she came no one knows, and after Baudelaire's death she disappears. Her beginning and her end are hidden in shadow. But thanks to the prestige of poetry, in this night with which Jeanne herself is merged, glow her enormous eyes, her eyes " as big as soup-plates." Stylised to-day by time, she is like one of those statues of ancient Egypt, in black marble, with enamelled eyes.

At that time the sphinx lived in the rue Saint-Georges, opposite the private house of Auber the musician, in a house on the foundations of which to-day thunder the printing-presses of *l'Illustration*. It was there that Jeanne returned one evening, after the theatre, accompanied by Baudelaire. This by no means austere young woman must without a doubt have cut short the addresses the poet was paying her; for she was eager to come to a conclusion—that is, to find

out if this individual who only moved in a maze of incomprehensible politeness, was a serious customer. Once she had scented good game, a well-to-do young man of family, it was for her to draw him into her den.

Whilst the sacrifice is being consummated, shall we glance through the curtains ? We should not hesitate to do so, without morbid curiosity but also without fear, if a description would serve to throw any light on the mystery that was being enacted. But there was nothing mysterious about it, except the colour of the priestess. She must have quickly classed Baudelaire among those whom women of her kind call, " fellows with queer ideas." Did she even stop to think that this boy was very young to be already so complex ? Not even that. Just as she did not understand the least thing about the niceties of his courtesy, any more than of his mind, so she made not the slightest attempt to discover the remote sources of his rapture, above all, of the power that perfumes seemed to have over him.

But, if she did not ask herself any questions, if she did not try to understand the tastes of her new lover, she none the less employed her instinctive knowledge to satisfy them. She brought into play, even on this first occasion, all the resources of her body, which was all the greater since its animal power, that power of which her tresses, alone, sufficiently revealed the force, was, in her, doubled with that deep cunning peculiar to primitive creatures. In spite of the obtuseness of her intellect, or even because of her undeveloped mind, she had a clear notion, clearer than any analysis could give, of her own interest. This feeling roused her. She never thought, on this occasion, of soon pretending to be sleepy, as she used to do with her ordinary casual guests.

And so late next day, after mid-day, when Baudelaire, a little unsteady, got out of bed and slowly and silently dressed, invisible bonds, strong as an iron chain, already

bound him to this savage Venus, who was sitting up in bed —in the daylight and whiteness of the sheets even more akin to the shadows—delicately, with the movements of a monkey, dipping her bread and butter in her chocolate.

It is unusual in Paris for an intimacy to begin without resulting in an immediate move. The lovers, greedy to see one another often, want to be near each other. To-day, motors have almost done away with distance, but in 1843 it meant a serious inconvenience. It was a long way from the rue Vaneau to the rue Saint-Georges. Baudelaire wanted to have his mistress at his very door, so that if he wished he might visit her for an hour between two spells of work ; for once more he was worried by the thought of the task that awaited him, and these trying material matters once arranged he was going to settle down to his labours.

As to Jeanne, she was ready to do whatever " M. Baudelaire " wished. She assumed a slavish submissiveness that consorted well with her type of beauty. Principally she saw in this scheme of her lord and master's (though he was really only of an age to be her lover simply), an opportunity for buying herself some furniture. With those subtle antennæ, which, with her, replaced intelligence, she had realized at once that the more time and money her young lover spent on setting up their new existence, the more attached to her he would become. Besides, when one upsets a woman's whole life, one undertakes at the same time to provide for her. So when " M. Baudelaire " expressed the wish that the actress should give up her part of three words (exactly three words : " Madame is served.") at the Panthéon theatre, Jeanne eagerly gave in to his whim. Henceforward she would belong entirely to this twenty-two-year-old sultan, who possessed a banking account.

Baudelaire, looking for a refuge for his passion, chose the delightful neighbourhood where he had lived before, the

Ile Saint-Louis. Jeanne was to live in the rue de la Femme-sans-Tête. There are names that would seem almost fated, especially when one considers that Jeanne's power was not, strictly speaking, in her head, or, at least, that her head only played a subsidiary, quasi-sexual part in her whole make-up. The rue de la Femme-sans-Tête, to-day rue le Regrattier, owed its name to a wine-merchant's sprightly sign which represented a woman without a head, holding a glass in her hand, beneath which was the inscription : " Nothing could be better." The poet, for his part, chose to take rooms in the *hôtel* Pimodan. As is well known, this mansion, which is also called the *hôtel* Lazun, contains wonderful rooms in the purest Louis XIV style. But it was not in the decorated part of the house that Baudelaire lived, for, in 1844, the novelist and poet Roger de Beauvoir rented it, and a little later the painter Boissard and Théophile Gautier, whose two apartments communicated. Théodore de Banville must have confused things when, in his *Souvenirs*, he speaks of Baudelaire's luxury and the large and sumptuous pieces of furniture which filled his rooms. As we have said, Banville was absolutely incapable of seeing things as they are, as opposed to Victor Hugo who, though his vision of reality was often distorted (and then, when he wished it, frequently apocalyptic), could, when he liked, equally well see everything with extraordinary precision.

The fact is that Baudelaire occupied a small suite of two rooms and a dressing-room, on the third floor among the attics, which was reached by a servants' staircase. We even know the rent he paid, and it is one that may well astonish us : 350 francs a year. But perhaps in this case multiplication by six, making it 2100 francs, would not be enough to give to-day's equivalent.

It is also one of the essentials of a love-affair that it should

entail extravagance ; one goes to expense not only to surround the object of it with attentions, but for one's own sake, not wishing to appear, now, except in a setting worthy of the emotion.

Baudelaire none the less felt the need to justify his extravagances to himself by all sorts of excellent reasons. He was above all preoccupied, he said, as he always was, with arranging his existence so as to be able to work. It was absurd to imagine that the artist could give himself up to his inspiration in any chance camping-ground. The artist is a dandy, and for a dandy it is essential to have his chosen furniture, favourite pieces with a familiar cat prowling around them, his engravings, his pictures—a medley of things that is full of meaning for the imagination and helps to make meditation fruitful.

Only, to procure all this, and to procure it quickly, Baudelaire's present income was inadequate. Never mind that ! There was, as it happened, on the ground-floor of the *hôtel* Pimodan, an antique dealer who offered the poet every sort of facility. We were expecting a man like that. He had to come. Or rather, he did not have to stir an inch. He stayed quiet in his shop, like a spider in the middle of its web. For several days he had seen the new tenant go past, that very well-dressed young man. He had made enquiries. One morning the poet walked into the trap. This excellent M. Arondel suggested, not only that he should sell him, on note of hand, anything he took a fancy to—those presses, or that black oak bed, carved like a coffin, but also that he should lend him money. After the courtesan, and what a courtesan ! the money-lender. It is classical. Before long, Baudelaire had signed bills that encumbered him all his life.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dissipation

> . . . Oui, je veux
> Être vertueux dans une heure. . . .

IT MAY be said that, from this moment, Baudelaire's destiny was determined. Mistakes had been made which, with a character like his, not merely obstinate, but scrupulously anxious not to evade any of the consequences of his actions, were to entail all his misfortunes. Jeanne had come into his life, and was not to leave it again.

So with Arondel. This first moneylender was but the harbinger announcing a swarm of others. It was an end of quiet, of ordered work, of all those excellent plans which had not yet even begun to be put into practice, and which soon became a theoretical ideal, put off from settling-day to settling-day, under a rain of bailiff's writs.

Scarcely a year had gone by since the poet had left his home, and it was already clear that his separation from his mother had not had the favourable consequences he had expected. He had lost that natural foothold of which, even at his age, he was still morally in need. At any rate Baudelaire himself says so, in that examination of his conscience which he made twenty years later, in 1861 : " I escaped, and after that I was completely abandoned. I cared only for pleasure, for continual excitation." But what did Baudelaire mean by this word " abandoned " ? How does it come about that, in the very sentence in which he admits his flight, he seems to throw on his mother the whole responsibility for a rupture which he alone desired and precipitated ? It is because his love for his mother never having ceased to be a passionate emotion, there was always something blind in this love and, as it were, a fatal

tendency to injustice. Yes, it was he who left the family home but, without daring to confess it, without expressing it to himself perhaps, he still thought in 1861 what he had thought a few months after his flight, that his mother ought not to have resigned herself so lightly to his departure. So lightly ? What did he know about that ? But he was judging it like a lover, who is astonished that the mistress he has left does not come to fetch him back.

Madame Aupick was an obedient wife. To her, her husband was perfect ; and if the general, with regard to his stepson, had perhaps been a little lacking in appreciation or had treated him with too rough a hand, his intentions, at any rate, were irreproachable. The most serious faults certainly did not lie with him. And besides, did not the poet's mother do everything in her power, after he had gone, to bring him back ? Did she not go so far as to visit him when, as a respectable woman, by so doing she exposed herself to the most disagreeable meetings ? This Baudelaire had forgotten in 1861.

Yet he had been the first to understand the unpleasantness that Mme. Aupick must suffer from so false a position, and he had considered it more *decent*, as he said, for him to be the one who was inconvenienced. But on the other hand, he had a horror of going to see his mother in her own house, in that middle-class drawing-room where the very curtains had a suffocating smell. When, by chance, he did venture so far, it always happened that he ran into some formal-mannered officer and sometimes the general himself, who on such occasions pretended to be unaware of his presence. Even the servants Baudelaire could not stand, for it seemed to him that they all had that imperceptible air of unwillingness which, in a footman, is an intolerable impertinence.

So it came about that the mother and son used to meet elsewhere, always furtively, like lovers. There were no

tea-shops at that time. But in winter the museums, the Louvre for preference, served as meeting-places. The red velvet seats in the Salon Càrré were often chosen by this homeless couple : this son, at once so attentive and so irritable, this loving but tactless mother, who quarrelled in low voices, and yet in spite of everything seemed to love each other so dearly.

As the mere mention of Charles's name was sufficient to call to the general's face an expression of severity which she knew only too well, Mme. Aupick for the most part concealed these meetings from him. Perhaps Baudelaire suspected this deception and secretly took pleasure in it. However deep a respect he had for his mother, his attitude was in no way different from that of a man who, being in love with a married woman, and having previously been deceived by her, in his turn deceives, with her, him who had taken her away.

In fine weather the interviews took place in the public gardens. On these occasions the poet was especially particular about his appearance, and he would offer his arm gallantly to his mother. Sometimes in their joy at seeing one another again, they would both forget the present : she, the terrible forebodings that she felt for the future of her only child, he, his arrears of work, his creditors and Jeanne.

There is in Baudelaire's correspondence a phrase that has always struck me as being something more than the expression of a simply æsthetic judgment, a phrase which, to my mind, hides beneath an apparent impersonality, a profoundly individual feeling : " Paris is only beautiful in sunlight, with its wonderful gardens." Such words have, it seems to me, an accent of regret : regret for those childhood strolls in the Luxembourg, perhaps, when the fatalities that were to follow had not yet been let loose, but also a tender backward glance at those too brief moments he had

enjoyed, under the shade of the trees, amidst the shouting of the pierrots, with his beloved mother.

When after a last kiss the mother and son separated, Baudelaire would go back to his island, and in his island, to the rue de la Femme-sans-Tête. And when, at the end of such afternoons, he went to see Jeanne, he was shocked as soon as he entered the room by the half-caste's vulgarity. But this sharp disgust was quickly followed by another kind of stupefaction.

At these moments, however, passion was not the only power to which Baudelaire submitted, or rather, his imagination enriched this power with all kinds of spells—above all, if Jeanne was content to say nothing, if her insane chatter gave place to amorous, catlike purring, as she crouched naked before the fire. Then she would lose her personality of a third-rate actress, of a cunning, greedy prostitute, and become Beauty, impersonal and sacred, beyond all morality. Not at all the serene beauty of the Greek ideal which, though above all ethical considerations, remains a transcendent image of the Good. It was even the exact contrary, as night is the antithesis of day : Beauty full of spells and evil incantations, the old-time witch of Thessaly, or Proserpine the sombre wife of Minos, or more profoundly still, according to the Christian outlook, the woman's face of the Other, the most dangerous incarnation of the Evil One.

Confronted with Mlle. Duval, endlessly retailing her silly tittle-tattle, Baudelaire began to suffer cruelly from a degrading companionship : before this dark body, naked save for its jewels, which in the firelight threw an immense shadow on the wall, like that of the Genius of Evil stretched over the world, the poet bowed his head and worshipped.

But the negress was fond of drink. Her voice, which a little while before had been " husky and sweet," already on certain days merited only the first part of this loving

description. It was a husky, drunkard's voice, neither more nor less.

Baudelaire, also, about this time, contracted the unfortunate habit of drinking. Yet no one, so far as I know, ever saw him drunk. He had too great a regard for what was correct to let himself go so far. But he loved wine and did not make a secret of it. He even extolled in poetry the excitation it produced in him. When, in his youth, he used to go to cafés, which was every day and often several times a day, his friends state that he invariably ordered white wine.

One day when he had gone to see Maxime du Camp (at Neuilly, where du Camp rented a house for the summer) his host offered him beer, but he declined it, saying that he drank only wine. Du Camp then asked him whether he preferred claret or burgundy. Baudelaire answered that he would gladly drink both. No doubt there was in this reply something of that irritating determination to astonish which was a mania with the poet, but the thing having been said and du Camp having taken him at his word, there was nothing for it but to live up to it. So, the claret and the burgundy being opened, Baudelaire, during his visit, drank both bottles without appearing in the slightest degree inconvenienced. He drank, says du Camp (who though generally rather unflattering to his colleagues, and to Baudelaire in particular, is incapable of fabricating stories without any foundation), swilling it down like a carter. Finally, and this is the worst indication that by the date of this visit (1852) Baudelaire had become what doctors call an "alcoholic," there is the fact that the sight of water was unbearable to his nerves. He begged du Camp to take away the carafe.

Soon he developed a liking for brandy as well as wine, and later on, for porter. He was a great smoker, too. But the abuse of alcohol, of tobacco, (to say nothing of

coffee, which he used to drink in great quantities at night, when he had an article, started at the last moment, to deliver in the morning), all this was only a beginning, in the way of excesses.

Already at that period drugs were in fashion. The use of them had not become general, as in our time, but in the circles in which Baudelaire moved it was the thing to indulge in them. Laudanum was the form in which Baudelaire took opium ; he had been acquainted with it from his youth. But it was haschish which was then chiefly favoured by the literary and artistic set, and it was at the *hôtel* Pimodan itself, at the painter Boissard's, that Baudelaire tried " Indian hemp " for the first time. A club had been formed which gathered together all the devotees of the " green paste " in the great Louis XIV salon—the Haschish Club. The poet was a member, and it was at one of the meetings of this club, or rather at one of the liturgical offices of this queer brotherhood, that he made Théophile Gautier's acquaintance.

About the same period Baudelaire was a frequenter of the café Momus, a gabled house standing at the entrance to the rue Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois. Clésinger, the sculptor, also used to go there, and the painter Courbet, both natives of Besançon, young and unknown ; Monselet, who was still younger, Monselet, already a poet of good cooking, and a noisy, excitable person from Besançon too, Armand Barthet. This young man had become famous overnight through the unexpected luck of having *Lesbia's Sparrow*, a little one-act play in verse, acted by Rachel at the Comédie Française ; and for having, at Victor Hugo's, in the Place Royale, broken a superb porcelain negro-boy in red and gold the first day he was introduced.

One day this puppy quarrelled with Baudelaire over some literary question. The argument became envenomed, and

Baudelaire received a blow in the face which stunned him with surprise. A duel was decided on. Baudelaire's seconds were Marc Trapadoux, " tall and black," Monselet said, " as a stick of liquorice," and another man of letters named Lebloys ; Barthet's seconds were a fellow townsman, a non-commissioned officer called Mignot and Monselet himself. To tell the truth, Baudelaire, although he had been struck, felt nothing of a Don Diego's passion at the insult ; seeing the ridiculousness of the affair, he would willingly have withdrawn his jeers, but Barthet, though he had given the blow, claimed to be the affronted party and wished absolutely to fight it out. The duel, however, did not take place ; the seconds, being men of sense and tired of the farce, all resigned one after the other.

This was only one of those ludicrous episodes which occur in the life of every independent young man, but the comic interlude quickly came to an end and the drama followed its course.

CHAPTER FIVE

Shifts

. . . l'Espoir
Vaincu, pleure . . .

WHEN a young man of fortune squanders his money, there exists a legal means of curbing his extravagances in his own interest ; that is, the appointment of an official trustee. How could M. and Mme. Aupick fail to have recourse to this procedure when they learnt that in the space of two years Charles's inheritance had been reduced by half ? For up till then, in the eyes of those who only take account of material results, the young writer's scheme of work and the first steps of his career had not been very apparent. One thing only was clear : his means had diminished in an alarming way, money, as the saying goes, slipping through his fingers, so that something had to be done without delay.

So long as this measure remained a threat (for that was how they made use of it at first, as an intimidation, as an attempt to bring the interested person to reflect and restrain himself) Baudelaire could always hope that the plan would never be put into execution. But as the young man seemed to have no intention of reforming his manner of life, his step-father and his mother decided to take action. A plea was entered in the Courts.

Baudelaire protested, furious. He was beside himself at this restriction of his rights. A little more and he would have seen in it an attack on himself, an act of war to which a woman, his mother, too weak to resist, had been prompted by a rival who hated him. Later, he will say that if he had been left free to spend his fortune to the last halfpenny it would have been better for him ; for then, not being able to count on any sort of income, he would have had to acquire,

voluntarily or by compulsion, that habit of regular work to which it was so hard for him to submit.

But M. and Mme. Aupick had a different aim, which was to ensure that Charles should at least not want for food and lodging whilst he lived. It is thanks to this foresight that Baudelaire was never, in fact, absolutely destitute. He experienced hardships and deprivations which were anguish to a man like him, but never absolute poverty. He had thirty-five thousand francs left, and for the rest of his life he never ceased to draw the income from this capital, which was paid him punctually by the trustee who had been chosen by the Courts in 1844 to represent them.

The judges' choice had fallen on one of the members of the family council, M. Ancelle. M. Ancelle, solicitor, borough councillor, justice of the peace, for twenty years mayor of Neuilly, was the perfect model of the honest, substantial bourgeois of the Louis-Philippe period; the incarnation of "Legality." A Joseph Prudhomme, we should say, if Joseph Prudhomme had not been as stupid as he was solemn; but Baudelaire's trustee was a sensible and judicious man, though he was all that with pomposity. He was cultivated, but decked himself out with quotations, and was above all, a lawyer to his finger tips. So it is impossible to imagine a character more different from the poet. All that the latter detested furiously found complete and final expression in M. Ancelle; he was morality itself, the morality of the middle-classes, I mean, of the time when M. Guizot, from the tribune, used to say to the representatives of the property-qualified electors, "Get rich!" M. Ancelle had all the prejudices of his caste but all its qualities, too. He was narrow-minded on many points, but then he was immovable as a rock in matters of fair dealing, of the legal conscience, of wise administration.

It seems as though there were in Baudelaire's life actual encounters between types. The poet had come in conflict

with the soldier. He had hurt by his paradoxes an honest sailor who could not help himself. And now the Law incarnate reared up in front of him. But with M. Ancelle, the expression may be just as well understood in this way—that, although he was strict as the Law, he had a heart all the same.

Baudelaire's first interviews with his trustee were stormy. They were always courteous, though, which for a nervous person made them all the more trying. The lawyer, taking his charge seriously, lectured him over his neckcloth, and the poet felt an intense desire to strangle him with that same neckcloth.

The cause of these disputes was Baudelaire's continual demands for money. Accustomed as he was to spending without calculation, he never succeeded in adapting himself to the practical effects of the new order, nor even in admitting its reasonableness. He was continually going to Neuilly, and was sometimes so ill with exasperation as to be obliged to pull himself together with brandy on the way. M. Ancelle never failed to receive his visitor with grieved paternal kindness, which had a way of aggravating the poet's rage. Moreover, the good man was long-winded, he rounded off his periods, he liked to hear himself talk. But on the essential point he remained unshakable. He would not consent to any advance beyond the amount he was authorized to pay the prodigal on the first of each month. One never got a halfpenny out of him. One might as well have applied to a locked and guarded safe.

Baudelaire's position, for the first time, had become disquieting. The bills signed for Arondel began to fall due. The lawyer, on principle, wished to ignore Arondel, thinking that it would have been playing the moneylender's own game to pay him off. But Arondel was not the only one to press for payment. There were the restaurant-keepers

who were very willing to give one credit for a certain time, but then sharply demanded settlement. There was the tailor, who presented his bill for a blue suit with metal buttons, like Goethe's, and besides, could one stint oneself of an account at the bookseller's, or at the binder's ? And when one had the chance of buying at a low price a drawing of Boilly's or an early state of a Jongkind, would it not be idiotic, you understand me, M. Ancelle, idiotic to have let it slip ?

As a result, Baudelaire was very hard up at the end of each month. Then he had recourse to the pawn shop, or else raised small loans from friends, repaying them directly he received his allowance ; or else again, he applied in the most dignified tone for an advance from the Author's Society, offering them as security, with the best faith in the world, the sums he was going to receive immediately for problematical works. But, in urgent, desperate cases, when one had absolute need of a certain sum the same day, or in an hour, to whom would one go if not to one's mother ? So he sent by messenger a curt, hastily scribbled note, from which all feeling is excluded, where there is no question of anything but the precise object of the request. So this young man, who with everyone, that is with everyone he cared nothing about, and with that monster Ancelle even, was all restraint, claimed as a right this lack of tact towards his mother, the only person on earth whom he loved more than life. The whole catalogue of hypocrisies was useful when one was writing to the president of the Author's Society, but to one's mother, the only person one can be sure of, one need only state facts. No doubt. Only, it should be added that if Baudelaire had approached M. Godefroy or M. Lireux in the same tone as he did Mme. Aupick, he would have run a great risk of having his letter thrown in the wastepaper basket, as coming from a madman. And he was aware of that.

Perhaps, when a man lays aside the social personality and shows himself as he is, he always has something of the appearance of a madman! There is something in the raw truth about a man which is terrifying for everybody except the being who worships him, of whose body he is the fruit, the very flesh—his mother.

But, it will be objected, the truth in this case is quite clear. It only amounts to saying: "I need such an amount. Send it to me." No, the real truth, the painful, grievous, atrocious truth does not lie in the bald statement of the figure. It lies in that sort of exhibition of oneself at the dreadful moment when, without politeness, without reticence, in short, without any veils, one begs for assistance, for help. The truth was this—there was Baudelaire, tracked down, and furious at being so, guilty of idleness and implicitly admitting his fault, dissatisfied with everybody and with himself; Baudelaire, who had left his family to astonish them by a rapid conquest of fame, after years of independence begging the loan of a little money, a loan which he knew to be as good as thrown away; the proud man humbling himself, furious at heart, thinking that M. Aupick, perhaps, would hear about it; the loser confessing his defeat, the clutch of the drowning man. . . . Yes, only a mother could bear the sight of that.

Poor Caroline did all that she could; she almost always sent the amount asked for, taking it from her own purse, for her household was excellently managed, and she was too scrupulous to cheat her husband who loved her and, as she expressed it, gave her "a golden life"; on the other hand, she distrusted her son. Oh! not Charles's heart, but his weakness, his frenzies; so she was careful not to seem to give in too quickly; at times, she turned a deaf ear, numb at heart, to try to increase the interval between his demands, so that Charles might in this way learn to count only on himself, on his work, and when she gave the messenger the

money asked for, she never failed to enclose a long letter with it, full of reproaches. advice, and love. Charles pocketed the money. Did he even read the letter ? What was the good ? He knew it so well already.

None the less his debts accumulated. The day came when the sums granted by Mme. Aupick were no longer sufficient to persuade his creditors to wait longer. A considerable lump sum was necessary that would enable him to wipe off the arrears. How was he going to get hold of this amount ? Ancelle was a tartar, a feelingless brute. It would have to be done by trick, he would pretend to commit suicide. But if the ruse was to succeed everybody would have to be duped, even his friends, everybody except Jeanne, his accomplice.

One evening at a public-house out at Châtillon where he was dining with Louis Ménard, Baudelaire induced his friend to discuss the best ways of killing oneself. At that time, as it happened, Ménard had just taken up chemistry and had entered Pelouze's laboratory, though not for that reason giving up either his study of Greek or of poetry. " Make me," Baudelaire said to Ménard, " some prussic acid." The only object of this conversation was to impress Ménard so that afterwards he could testify, among their friends, that for a long time Baudelaire had intended to have done with life.

Another time, acting on the same plan, the schemer, with a gloomy face, asked Charles Cousin his opinion about the immortality of the soul. Then he sent a batch of manuscripts to Banville. Some of these were annotated in this style ; " Do all you can to prevent this being published." On seeing which, Banville would have said, " Quite easy ! " and thrown those poems in the fire. Is this quite what happened ? Banville may have smiled, but he had an indulgent nature. Besides, it is possible that he may not

have believed in the reality of his functions as literary executor and saw through the mystification.

Baudelaire, however, was no longer to be met anywhere. In the end his friends became alarmed. Had not one of his intimate friends received a letter (dated June 30, 1845), a sort of testament, in which Baudelaire announced, explicitly this time, his coming suicide, and entrusted Jeanne to his friend ? Ménard hurried to the mulatto's, and found her draped in yellow satin, lounging about with a cigarette in her mouth. From the lips of the sphinx herself he learnt that the poet had been carried, wounded, back to his home.

Baudelaire, in fact, had wounded himself lightly, very lightly, in the chest. The scene had taken place in a cabaret in the rue de Richelieu, with Jeanne present. It was essential, indeed, that the attempted suicide should be in public in order that it might have consequences that would make an impression on the young man's parents. He himself landed up more or less fainting at the police-station first of all, and from there the general and his wife were informed.

Poor Caroline ! we can only say once more ! Had the culprit really considered what his unhappy mother's emotion would be, seeing him laid out bleeding on a stretcher ? Evidently he had, since it was on that emotion he had based his calculations.

The shabby plot succeeded. The general, who was still rather simple, let himself be moved. A part of Charles's debts was paid, and the prodigal son was even invited to live for the future in the house where he had been sheltered and nursed.

But, though scarcely recovered, Baudelaire escaped for the second time. He was in a hurry to get back to the rue Femme-sans-Tête, and to recover there everything that made up that illusion of a life of freedom of which he was

already the prisoner, of which he would soon be the galley-slave. A few days after that, the poet, meeting Louis Ménard, told him : " I have left my home again. At my mother's they only drink claret and I cannot do without burgundy." This was another piece of bluff.

CHAPTER SIX

Homo Duplex

Derrière les ennuis et les vastes chagrins.

BUT WHAT became of the great poet, the *vates*, the creator, the precursor, in the midst of all these irregularities ? In this weak, restless man with his sickly sensuality, in this prodigal, irascible mystifier, where was the immortal Baudelaire ? For indeed, however outwardly disordered this existence may have been, however difficult it might have been to exemplify from it its obvious coherence, evidences of Baudelaire's genius are none the less there ; one above all, a book of cardinal importance, so rich in meaning and implications, that more than sixty years after the death of its author, more than eighty years after the composition of its earliest poems, it can still be read continually.

It would be too simple to decide that the work of a writer is independent of the man. Such a point of view is always a mistake, but in Baudelaire's particular case it would be an absurdity. Here the work is to such a degree inherent in the man that to eliminate it from his life would be to rob this life not only of its meaning, but of its very reality, its substance.

Baudelaire himself, it is true, complained of his inability to tie himself down to work. Yet there is more than one kind of work. For a general, for a lawyer, for a good Mme. Aupick, and even for many editors of papers and reviews, for the great majority of literary men, what is a writer who works ? It is someone who day after day sits down to his table, writes a certain number of pages every twenty-four hours of the book he has on the stocks, or, perhaps, turns out articles or stories—one of the regular purveyors to this

or that publisher, to this or that public ; who draws money every month from a number of sources, who has a name, a reputation, in fact, a position ; someone who has received or will receive a decoration, who one day will seek election to the Academy and will perhaps be elected.

There are authors of talent, authors of genius, who have worked in this way. These are the luckiest ones, or those with the strongest wills, those who, thanks to the happy balance of their faculties, to a wise management of their gifts, thanks to a perfect harmony of action and meditation, have built up side by side, supporting the one with the other, as it were, their work and their career.

But Baudelaire was, before everything, essentially a poet. Doubtless among poets, and among the greatest of them, there are regular workers. Used not Victor Hugo to be standing at his desk every morning, like a carpenter at his bench, scratching away at the paper with his goose-quill, breaking off from time to time to swallow an egg, then picking up again and weaving together the threads of his task and of his inspiration, and doing that all his long life ? A magnificent power of work which, not less than the majesty and variety of the work itself, surpasses ordinary honest values and bewilders the mind. Yet can one make a rule from such a way of working which it would be good (that is to say, profitable for poetry) for all poets, without exception, to conform to, in the measure of their capacity, of course ? No, and it was useless for Baudelaire to accuse himself ; he was a great worker and is, in this respect, himself a model. Certainly, daily work was to remain for Baudelaire almost all his life a never-realised ideal, but, at the same time, it was an ideal that he never renounced, for the poet was aware that this was the only productive way of working, and the bailiffs haunted him like ghosts. But this task to which Baudelaire constrained himself with such difficulty, should not make us forget that

M. Baudelaire's Nights
from a caricature by Durandeau

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there is another, one which is really his own, and in which from his youth to his death he gave evidence of an admirable tenacity, of scrupulousness and energy. One need only read the numerous variants to his poems, and there is not one of these, not one, which compared with the earlier reading is not a happy alteration, one of the subtle improvements like those little touches that suddenly give to the dreamt-of form its full realisation. But these invaluable finds, so long sought for, and glimpsed as it were in the extreme concentration of thought, in a continual coalition of imagination and taste, were not discovered by Baudelaire at his desk. It was often in the street, in a café, with Jeanne. . . . How many times the poet must have reproached himself for his afternoons of idling, those evenings virtually lost, when he had resolved to write an article and had not had the heart! He would return home and the sight of his writing-paper would make him feel ill, so profound was his remorse. From these expeditions, though, he brought back treasures that dazzle us even to-day with their splendour.

More than once, at the spectacle of his ungovernable youth, people must have exclaimed, "This Baudelaire is a madman." Yet, beneath all his disorderliness, in conduct, in questions of health and money matters, this man had only one passion, order; and not this time the order so rarely observed of working at fixed hours, but an inward order which the poet withheld and cultivated, which gave to his art, to his technique, precisely those virtues which were lacking in his life—strict discipline, hatred of go-as-you-please, love of symmetry and balance and perfection.

But, it will be objected, this is a question of literature, of the spirit of Baudelaire's poetry, and in this province, which is more or less secret, more or less arcane, it is always easy to invent. No, the discipline I speak of is so real a thing, that even in this irregular existence it is patently

visible. This young man, so in love with fame, with such a furious appetite for power, was in no hurry to publish his poems. He controlled his impatience by his concern for the finished work; for however extravagant in idea he might seem, he had his method, that of Boileau's *Art poétique*; he was a classic.

Homo duplex, in truth! Baudelaire was twofold, and the continual attempt at conciliation, the long quarrel between his two natures, those debates which could only be terminated by the dissociation of his personality in death (or by the liberation of his soul perhaps), this was the tragedy of his life.

For the moment these two Baudelaires were forced by circumstances to unite; a sort of compromise was effected between them, though not without suffering and complaints. The same year that he had attempted to commit suicide, Baudelaire published his first work, a volume of art criticism: *The Salon of* 1845.

This time, the fact that the poet was commissioned to prepare a book by a certain date had a happy result. The young writer showed himself to be an aesthetician of the first rank. In his poetry it was possible for the form to be unrecognized by those who could not recognize poetry in any case. But in this work of examination and discussion and reasoning it showed itself clearly. A superior conception of the artistic endeavour, a respect for lofty disciplines, all the directing forces of a noble mind were there displayed, joined with a penetrating taste and an extraordinary maturity of thought and style. It appeared that this same man whose private life was going adrift, had not ceased to orientate himself, to take his bearings, in matters of art.

Baudelaire had loved pictures since his childhood. His father had been a "detestable artist," as he calls him, but

an artist all the same. The poet never used to pass the Louvre without going in, if only for a moment, to glance at some picture that he loved. His predilections sometimes varied, but they were always keen. And already this eccentric had an amazing way of placing works of art, of cataloguing and classing them. This rebel had an innate understanding for the hierarchy, the cult of what may be called spiritual distances. He clearly shows the gulf between Delacroix and Decamp, for instance. It would be impossible to speak of Corot with more sympathy, or of Horace Vernet, of Meissonier, Ary Scheffer, Etex, with more incisive malice than does this boy of twenty-four, who had been considered until then, by some people as misled, by others as half-mad.

It was at this Salon of 1845, at the Louvre, that Baudelaire made the acquaintance of Asselineau, who became his most faithful friend. Asselineau was also " doing a salon," as they say in literary jargon. Coming out of the exhibition the two young men went to write up their notes together, at a wine-merchant's in the rue du Carroussel. Baudelaire, as was his habit, called for white wine, biscuits, and new pipes, the clay pipes, doubtless, that it was then the custom for waiters to keep a supply of. The next day the new friends met again at the Café Lamblin. From that day their friendship was assured.

Baudelaire's critical essay attracted the attention of connoisseurs, and this success opened the columns of the *Corsaire-Satan* to him, where contributions were paid for at the rate of a halfpenny or three-farthings a line. Obviously, the *Corsaire-Satan* was not a gold-mine, and the editor, M. Lepoittevin Saint-Alme, even had the irritating solemnity of M. Ancelle. But this old journalist was capable of an irony the lawyer did not possess ; so that one day, Asselineau relates, when some nobody burst into the office fuming with rage, intending to get satisfaction for some

slighting reference to himself, M. Lepoittevin Saint-Alme, without saying a word, lifted up his smoking-cap and revealed a snow-white head, which immediately squashed any idea the angry visitor may have had of a possible duel.

At the *Corsaire* Baudelaire met Champfleury, and came in touch with Banville again, who, always optimistic, gracious and productive, had already, in 1846, published his second volume of verse, *les Stalactites*. (*Les Jets d'eau* would have been a title better suited to this gushing facility.)

It was in the *Corsaire-Satan*, too, that Baudelaire published his first pieces of literary criticism. In one of these he did not let off his friend Louis Ménard, whose *Prométhée délivré* had just come out under the pseudonym of Louis de Senneville, at all lightly. Baudelaire's article was decidedly slashing. The critic argued that poetry is essentially philosophic, but that it must be so involuntarily, and that what is called philosophical poetry is a bastard species. There could be no objection to that. If Sully Prudhomme had considered this little essay perhaps he would not have written *la Justice*, a poem in ten parts. But Baudelaire had been at school with Ménard and the virulence with which he attacks his old form-mate is excessive. "There is," he wrote, "a certain merit in the man." This concession is the worst cut. It is unjust. Baudelaire was wrong. The mediocrity of Ménard's poetical work misled him as to the value of the man.

However, there he is, the real "disorderly" man, the real Jack-of-all-trades, Ménard. He was not without genius all the same. In that same year, 1846, he had invented collodine and in 1847 a powerful explosive, nitromannite. Then he gave up chemistry. Baudelaire was more steadfast. Always true to his nature, at this period he redoubled his applications to Ancelle, the requests to his mother; he even sent to Mme. Aupick friends like Auguste

Vitu ; and struggled with his creditors, Joissans, keeper of a cabaret, Lebois, Blanchard and Siméon, the whole pack of tradesmen, not to mention Arondel. In the hope of putting the latter off his track, the poet fled the Ile Saint-Louis and changed his address a number of times—drew breath for a moment at the hôtel Corneille, then stopped at 33 rue Coquenard, after that, hôtel de Dunkerque, 32 rue Lafitte, then 36 rue de Babylone, and again in the rue Lafitte at the hôtel Folkestone ; and at other places besides, in little furnished hotels—" dark and undiscoverable." His wanderings had begun, the flights, the feints, the doublings, all the manœuvres of the stag at bay. There was also the hospitality he could ask of his friends, of Asselineau or Nadar, for a night and sometimes for a week ; or the forced hospitality of the guardroom of the *garde-nationale*, when he had dodged his turn of service too often.

In the midst of these troubles, Baudelaire found time to publish a *Salon* for 1846, which clearly established his reputation as an art critic.

In March of the same year he published in the *Corsaire*, *Choix de maximes consolantes sur l'amour*, a witty essay written in a grandiloquent style, but where the frozen rhetoric hides more confidences beneath its impersonal aphorisms than would appear. For instance, one reads there that in love, vice and moral ugliness have their good and beautiful sides. It was Jeanne who inspired this reflection, and further on she appears again, magnified, though without pity, at once revered and insulted by such a judgment as : " Stupidity is often the ornament of beauty. . . . It is stupidity that gives the eyes that sad limpidity of sombre pools." And it was assuredly under her aphrodisiacal sway, a prey to the obsession of her lean, swarthy body, that the poet ventured this asseveration : " Never speak ill of mighty Nature, and if she has

allotted you a flat-chested mistress, say : ' I have a friend—with buttocks ! ' And go to the temple to give thanks to the gods."

The following month (April 1846) Baudelaire published in the *Esprit Public*, *Conseils aux jeunes écrivains*, a title and subject which at his age may appear presumptuous. It is true there is in this article still plenty of affectation, plenty of " dandyism," but how high an idea he already has of his art. Whilst he pretends to be teaching his fellow-writers, he is really lecturing himself.

Lastly, still in 1846, the poet tried his hand at writing stories, but with little success. *Le Jeune Enchanteur*, which appeared in the *Esprit Public*, is a cold and obscure work and employs an " antiquity " already out of date. There is more originality about *la Fanfarlo* (1847). But in it the romantic invention seems poor, stifled by the descriptions. It is hard for Baudelaire to create characters distinct from himself, and so he makes up for it in the descriptive parts, which thus have a value of their own : that, already, of the prose poem. Yet at this time the poet was dreaming of writing novels. He informed his mother that he already knew where to sell them, and added : " Two months' work will be enough ! " Illusions !

Nevertheless, in the midst of all his worries this bohemian had made a loyal effort to straighten out his affairs. But Baudelaire would probably have lost by making a regular demand on his talent ; he was not made for regular work. What he calls his laziness perhaps protected him. At the end of his life, amid the ruin of his hopes, he was to realize it. He notes : " It is by leisure that I have, in part, developed—to my great detriment, for leisure without wealth increases one's debts and the affronts resulting from debts—but with great profit as regards sensibility and meditation. . . . Other literary men are, for the most part, despicable and very ignorant plodders."

Unfortunately in this struggle his nature was embittered. Given the involved state of his affairs, the article called *Comment on paie ses dettes quand on a du génie*, in which he goes so far as to taunt men whom he admires, Balzac, Gautier, Gérard de Nerval, appears to be the result of an outburst of spleen, from which envy (perhaps unknown to himself) is not altogether absent. In the same way, a little later, in an article called *l'École païen*, he has a hit, though without naming them, at his friends Banville and Leconte de Lisle.

But we find Baudelaire's finest quality, already complete and in all its splendour, in the two poems he contributed to *l'Artiste impénitent*, *Don Juan aux enfers* and *A une Indienne*, which were to be included in a volume announced for the present under the title, *Les Limbes*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Amongst the Revolutionaries

Dàns les plis sinueux des vieilles capitales.

PARIS before 1848 was still Old Paris, a monstrous offshoot from the Paris of Charles V. Certainly styles had changed, and the stone hydra was already beginning to creep up the slopes of Montmartre and Menilmontant ; but in its growth the great wen had only extended the huddled mass of the old city and its inextricable alleys in a chain of irruptions.

It would seem that the ambition of a politician, rather than of a hygienist, was necessary before the pickaxe could clear it away ; that before these dwellings could be disinfected the inhabitants had to be crushed. It was only their experience of revolutions that induced the authorities to pierce this dangerous labyrinth, as early as possible, with broad straight avenues which could be effectually commanded by artillery. But this foresight was not to hinder the downfall of Louis Philippe's government, for the unexpected is always one of the characteristics of revolution.

Even to-day Old Paris is far from having entirely disappeared, but it survives only in isolated patches round the central districts. But then it was still the Paris of narrow, crowded, swarming houses, their bulging fronts buttressed from the edge of the pavement ; the Paris of passage-ways and courts above the level of the roadway and steps with shining rails that the street-boys used to slither down ; the Paris of long paved corridors, with the concierge on the landing behind his little window ; the Paris of unhealthy courtyards and grimacing shop-signs ; the Paris of impossible balconies, dangling their gardens in a forest of zinc chimney cowls. . . .

Such was Baudelaire's Paris ; not the hooting, roaring, speeding city of to-day, but a swarming mass of people, where the horseshoes struck showers of sparks from the granite streets. It was a very different Paris from the city Verlaine knew, though that too has already changed a great deal. The one is dark and rainy, like Paris overlaid with an impression of Lyons ; the other, whitened and dusty, like a Raphael pastel. The one is asphyxiating, the other airy, the new buildings standing by themselves in nondescript plots of ground and, not far off, the suburbs with their withered arbours.

At the end of 1847 the tortuous Paris of Baudelaire's day was beginning to bestir itself stealthily. The aspect of the famous Faubourg Saint-Antoine became more alarming every week.

The truth is, that the republicans, frustrated in 1830, still felt a deep grudge against the rich middle classes whose game they had played. During the last few years there had been numerous outbursts of discontent, as the register of the Mont-Saint-Michel jail testifies, where the majority of the democratic leaders had been sent to roast and freeze by turns beneath the leads.

Even in 1840, Heinrich Heine, at that time anonymous Paris correspondent to the *Gazette d'Augsburg*, had sent his paper a curious description of a visit he had paid to the workshops in the Faubourg Saint-Marceau. The poet, still too recent a Parisian to focus his impressions, had been literally terrified by the spectacle he had witnessed. He had seen in the workmen's hands cheap penny reprints of the speeches of Robespierre, Marat's pamphlets, Babeuf's doctrine by Buonarotti and other writings which, he said, had the smell of blood about them. In the blaze of the steel factories, amidst the clanging of hammers, he had heard songs with " horrible refrains " and of a temper that seemed to him diabolical. But it must be admitted that

there was enough of the devil in Heine himself, for him to take a mephistophelean pleasure in terrifying the good citizens of Augsburg from afar, even at the risk of making them drop their porcelain pipes in alarm.

However, there was this much truth in the heightened picture that he gave : the " lion of the People " was far from contented with its lot. In 1847, no longer hoping that either the Senate or the Chamber would do anything to alleviate its conditions, it was preparing to act on its own.

Till now Baudelaire had always shown a violent antipathy to those who professed advanced political opinions. He used to say that it was a real pleasure for him to see a republican being beaten by a policeman.

In 1848, in *Choix de maximes consolantes sur l'amour*, he wrote : " There are some people who are annoyed with their mistresses for their prodigality ; they are skinflints, or republicans who know nothing of the first principles of political economy."

And, further, at the beginnings of the 1845 and 1846 *Salons*, the young writer had attempted a rehabilitation of the " Bourgeois " reconciled henceforth with his natural enemy, the " Artist." Indeed, there is in these pages a tone of such insistent flattery towards the propertied classes, that one wonders whether the author was sneering at M. Ancelle and at us, but I see in this, principally, a literary manifesto, intended as a reaction against the tendencies of the preceding period. The " Jeune-France " group had been anti-bourgeois on principle and it was up to their successors, who called themselves anti-romantics, to adopt the opposite attitude.

Nevertheless there was something sincere in Baudelaire's aversion from democracy ; he looked upon it as the enemy of luxury and, in consequence, of the fine-arts and of literature.

At the same time this did not prevent the poet from having comrades and friends among the young republicans : Louis Ménard to begin with (though since the article in the *Corsaire*, he had more or less broken with him), Leconte de Lisle, whom he had met in 1842 in Ménard's " garret," Thoré, Hippolyte Castille, and, especially, the song-writer Pierre Dupont, a native of Lyons, exactly the same age as Baudelaire, whose faith and gentleness and simple goodness had a little imposed upon him.

On the other hand, however anti-democratic he may have been, the step-son of General Aupick had, at this time, an almost morbid hatred of any kind of official. " How many rebellious spirits," he wrote, " must have been made by contact with a cruel and punctilious officer of the Empire." Except that M. Aupick could not be described as " cruel," we surely have here an interesting confidence, slipped into an article in the shape of a general reflection. However that may be, it is a fact that the memory of his stepfather's uniforms inspired the poet with such a horror of gold lace, that he could not bear the sight of it even on a bishop's mitre.

All this is very contradictory, but because I have said that there was a fundamental side of Baudelaire that cared deeply for order, for the hierarchy, there is no reason to suppose that this side, though the most fundamental of all, would make its presence felt on every occasion. On the contrary, during these years, 1848-51, the other side of Baudelaire, the fanatic, the rebel, was continually to mask the meditative attitude of the great writer behind a frenzied gesticulation.

It is not possible to believe that in a revolutionary crowd everybody has a clear idea of the reasons why he is acting in such a way, or that, even among those who realize what is driving them to act, the motives, the determining factors, are always of a political nature. When the leaders, even,

are often at the mercy of personal impulses, what can be said of those who are only followers ?

At that time Baudelaire was practically living at the café. One can imagine something of the ferment in the Paris cafés at the time and the intensity of the arguments round the billiard tables and backgammon boards, in the last months of 1847, whilst the banquet campaign was in progress. In spite of his recent apotheosis of the bourgeois, it does not seem to me to be possible that Baudelaire, himself an intellectual, could have been a supporter of an electoral system by which such a man as Michelet might be disqualified from voting. Had he not, in the midst of his flatteries, whispered in the sanctimonious ear of the " Bourgeois," that though they possessed wealth, which is strength, yet they lacked knowledge? The " adjonction des capacités" then, which was one of the measures of electoral reform demanded by the radicals, cannot have left the poet quite unmoved. For he was always interested in politics : " I have convinced myself a hundred times," he wrote in 1861, " that I should never take any further interest in politics, and at every serious issue I am again seized with curiosity and passion."

But the truth, principally, is this : in spite of the real effort he had been making for the past two years to support himself by his work, his position at the end of 1847 was actually rather worse, although his mother had provided him with fresh furniture, what he had had before having been seized for debt. M. Ancelle was unconquerable in his refusal to allow Baudelaire any advance, so that the poet was sometimes obliged to stay in bed for three days, having no linen or, it might be, no fuel. To struggle against his despondency he increased his doses of laudanum, but his distress was such that he contemplated leaving his country and going back to Mauritius, where he meant to get a post as tutor in a friend's family, the Bragard's, no doubt.

The Christian that always lurked in Baudelaire regarded this extreme resolve as an expiation, as a means of punishing himself, he said, for having failed in all his ambitions ; and what tempted the neurasthenic was the idea of a sort of slow suicide, " suicide by boredom, the horrible boredom and mental debilitation of hot, cloudless countries."

So, since revolutions are brought about by the discontented, is it not clear that this young man, even admitting that he might not care a jot about " electoral qualifications " or " capacités," was ripe to take part in one ?

The first shots of the February rising had rung out in the Boulevard des Capucines ; and already they were throwing up barricades. What animation there was on the night of February 23rd in the heart of the old faubourgs ! When day came all Paris was in arms. Soon there was fighting in the rue de Valois and the rue Saint-Honoré. Bugeaud was swept away. King Louis-Philippe, terrified, with senile docility resigned everything to M. Crémieux, and fled in a cab by the Avenue de Neuilly whilst the revolutionaries overran the Tuileries.

What was Baudelaire's attitude at this moment ? He was on the side of the rising. Memories of his reading, memories, too, of actual experiences, of Paris in 1830, of Lyons in 1834, came back to his mind, and of another, too, a milder one, of a purely local and economic scuffle which he had witnessed in 1844 in the Ile Saint-Louis, when the Parisians rose against the Company which levied a toll on the bridges, and sacked its offices.

On this occasion the trouble was much more serious. The crowd pillaged a gunsmith's shop in the Carrefour Buci and Baudelaire was one of the raiders. The colour of his cravat, which was blood-red, proclaimed his politics. He seized a rifle and a yellow-leather cartridge-belt. " I have just been firing," he told his friend Buisson, who was

there by chance, a moment later. The weapon and belt were obviously brand-new, and Baudelaire was exaggerating. Perhaps he had been drinking a good deal of white wine. The taverns can have been in no danger of closing for lack of customers in those violent times.

The poet was greatly excited. "We have got to go and shoot General Aupick," he kept on repeating like a refrain. Was it really a question of political ideas, then? What were the Republicans to him, even at that moment when he found himself in their ranks? Nor had he much more interest in the bourgeois. Merely to think of the figure M. Ancelle must have cut at that moment made him roar with laughter. He was intent on a different object. In the first place, he was seeking sensations in this confusion. Was he not an artist, an artist who had written in his notebooks this short, alarming sentence: "I can understand anyone deserting one cause to find out what it will be like to serve another." And again: "In every change there is something shabby and agreeable at once, resembling infidelity and moving house. This suffices to explain the French Revolution." This at least suffices, one might say, to explain Baudelaire's taking part in the Revolution of 1848, since it is his own feeling he here expresses.

And besides, how could Baudelaire, when his naturally sensitive nerves were still further undermined by drugs, resist the feverish excitement of the streets, which was like a warm wind making one forget the cold winter air? In any case, opium enormously magnifies reality, till a few rifle-shots become a continuous fusillade, the barricade grows enormous, and a red rag on the end of a stick seems some prodigious symbol. In the lowest depths of the soul, things that one never knew were in one, stir and awake: the desire for vengeance, for personal vengeance first, certainly, (M. Aupick has got to be shot), but also for an

anonymous, general, universal vengeance, the satanic pleasure of destruction.

And lastly, in this upheaval creditors and bailiffs could go hang. All payments were suspended, all negotiations broken off, for in time of war and revolution one can snap one's fingers at the whole Code of Civil Procedure ; and this respite by itself was wonderfully intoxicating. I must go for a walk in the Ile Saint-Louis this evening, Baudelaire thought to himself. The day before he had been flying from Arondel, to-day he sought him out to bait him.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Rage and Vexation

Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves.

AFTER the insurgents, the ideologues. God knows they were numerous enough in the dark streets of old Paris. How many amateur reformers to each serious politician! No more caution-money, no more stamp-duties, no more September Laws. Henceforth, the Press was to be free. From February 24th to May 4th, 1848, a hundred and forty-two periodicals sprang up in the capital, and swarms of newsvendors filled the city. Everyone who could use a pen scribbled a rhetorical pamphlet at the café and sent it round at once to the nearest printer's.

It was in this way that the *Salut Public* appeared, which Baudelaire and two of his friends, Champfleury and Toubin, his associates on the *Corsaire*, founded the day after the Revolution. The editorial staff had their office on the second floor of the Café Turlot, called the Café de la Rotonde, near the École de Médecine. The first number, put together in less than two hours, came out on February 27th.

It was a pretty poor thing. Yet in the midst of bombastic phrases in the style of the period, there is this criticism of Thiers: "A spiteful ape, laughing and crying, gesticulating and leaping about, believing in nothing and writing on everything. Without believing in the Revolution, he has written *La Révolution*, without believing in the Empire he has written *L'Empire*. . . ." And this, which has a touch of Baudelaire's incisiveness, a little pedantic and patronising: "Some misguided comrades have been breaking up printing presses. . . . All machines are sacred like works of art." This again: "The theatres are re-opening.

We have quite enough tragedies. It must not be imagined that alexandrines constitute patriotism."

Baudelaire insisted on taking the sheet himself to Mgr. Affre at the archbishop's palace. This was a strange idea, but he was not even admitted, and to compensate himself paid a visit to Raspail, his idol of the moment.

On the 28th the second number was issued. It was ornamented with a vignette, by Gustave Courbet, to distinguish it from another sheet which in the confusion had adopted the same title. This picture, though commonplace, is quite typical. It depicts some insurgents firing over a barricade of paving-stones. Now these revolutionaries are in workmen's blouses, but they are wearing top-hats. Are they workers who have adopted the headgear of the intellectuals ? It is more likely that they are intellectuals who have dressed up in the working-class uniform. And that, in fact, is a very good portrait of the proletariat of 1848, politically almost unreal, still in the all but theoretic state, a symbolic proletariat.

This second number of the *Salut Public* is no better as a whole than the first. I should prefer to think that it was Toubin who was responsible for such depths of pathos. Yet the same sentiment of sympathetic indignation is to be found there as had aroused Auguste Barbier in 1830 and inspired his famous poem, *la Curée.* 1848 provided the same spectacle ; man hardly changes at all. " We have just come from the Ministries," someone wrote in this number, " we have just come from the *Hotel de Ville* and the *Préfecture de Police.* The corridors are full of place-hunters. The stones of our streets are still red with the blood of our brothers, who died for liberty. Let us, let us at least leave their noble shades an instant's illusion as to our virtues." That is no longer the voice of Toubin.

But already their capital, which amounted to ninety francs advanced by Toubin himself, had been exhausted.

The first number had sold very well ; only the newsvendors, out-of-work artisans, had neglected to bring back to the office the money they had received. And although Baudelaire, after putting on his white blouse, went out in person to cry the second number in the rue Saint-André-des-Arts, the crowd had not responded to his call. The cashbox was empty, and even in a time of revolution the Paris printer does not work for nothing, for amateurs at any rate, though if it had been a case of fellow-unionists like Cabet, Pierre Leroux or Prudhon one would have given them credit—for a few days. But this citizen with moustaches and imperial, who thought he was a revolutionary because he had sported a red bow, this fellow Baudelaire—no. Persistence was useless. And that was why the third number of the *Salut Public* never appeared.

If the poet was affected by this set-back, at any rate it did not cure him of his inveterate habit of solemn leg-pulling. Did he not contribute to *l'Echo des marchands de vin*, a poem called *le Vin de l'assassin*, which was hardly flattering to the honourable Company ?

His friends, too, had been caught up in the great humanitarian outburst. Ménard, deserting chemistry, had flung himself into the struggle. The " Club des Clubs " had sent Leconte de Lisle to Brittany as their delegate, to enlighten the masses in view of the approaching elections. For the country was now invited to make use of its conquest for the first time : the universal franchise, but the political education of the people, especially in the provinces, was non-existent. " What is to be done in a revolution," Prudhon was soon to say, " when one does not possess the secret of it ? The socialists had faith in the Social Revolution, but they had neither the necessary knowledge nor the key to it." These were wise words. Leconte de Lisle, a new evangelist, was left stranded at Dinan by his Club. The missionary

returned home disgusted with action and ever after kept his revolutionary faith, with his other dreams, under lock and key in his ivory tower.

The parliament elected on April 23rd was a reactionary one ; the example of Paris had not been followed. On May 15th the Chamber of Representatives was invaded by the mob. Baudelaire sympathised with the partisans of the Social Republic who had organised that day's work. " Always this appetite for destruction," he noted in his private papers. And he added, " A legitimate appetite, if everything that is natural is legitimate." There is a risky theory ! But this violent measure proved useless.

But in June, after the break-up of the national workshops, a new and terrible insurrection broke out. Baudelaire again took part in it. This time his companions' fury seems to have sincerely won him over. On the other side of the barricades the bourgeois detachments of the National Guard fought ferociously. The poet was exasperated beyond anything by the arrest of de Flotte. " They have arrested him," he cried, " because his hands smelt of powder. Smell mine ! " This time he was not lying. His friend Pierre Dupont tried in vain to calm him. Fortunately, Chennevières (the author of *Contes de Jean de la Falaise*, and afterwards Principal of the Beaux-Arts) happened to come by with Le Vavasseur, both old friends of the Normandy School. They were accompanied by a National Guard, a man from their own country, and thanks to the latter's cockade they managed to save Baudelaire from a scrape. So the Normandy School served some purpose after all.

But meanwhile what news was there of General Aupick ? Good news, naturally : some people are destined to be fortunate.

In 1830, it will be remembered, this excellent officer had had the good fortune to be in Algiers during the revolt,

and the new régime, the third under which he had served, had promoted him. In February 1848, when Louis-Philippe's monarchy was falling, he had the rank of General of Division. How did the General behave during those difficult times? Loyally, without doubt; cleverly, for certain. At the end of February, too zealous a defence of order would not have been acceptable, of the order of the bourgeois monarchy, I mean, for a new order, more generous, but very confused—some people would call it disorder—was about to take its place. In June things had changed. Cavaignac, in the name of the Republic, had suppressed the rising with a sternness only equalled by that of Thiers, another republican, in 1871. But it is probable that General Aupick, being on the staff, remained outside the fray, and had no conscientious scruples to resolve. His lucky star none the less watched over him. A fourth government, to be followed by a fifth, continued his promotion almost as soon as it was in power.

The man must certainly have had merit, but that is not sufficient for success; luck is also needed, and the General had plenty of it. The only shadow in his life was this troublesome step-son, whose name he never wished to hear again. At all events, the government of the Republic determined to employ this most decorative officer as a diplomatist, and, in 1848, he was appointed ambassador to the Sublime Porte.

Caroline was by no means out of place in her new position as ambassadress. Had not the one-time ward of M. Pérignon been taught since childhood to submit to every social ordinance, and had she not, besides, acquired from her first husband certain niceties of etiquette that must have seemed to M. Aupick, brought up in the rough life of camps, the last degree of refinement? But, above all, Caroline was agreeable; even at fifty-five, with grey hair (at that time only courtesans, actresses and, of course,

certain princesses, dyed their hair), she still had charm. Besides, the Minister for Foreign Affairs who appointed General Aupick as ambassador, was Lamartine. Thus Baudelaire's step-father was indebted to a poet for his latest honour. Perhaps an ordinary minister would not have had an independent enough mind to select a man who was not in the " service." However that may be, as everyone knows, it is the wife, as well as the husband, who is appointed to an embassy. It is clear, therefore, that Caroline must also have received Lamartine's approbation. Now Caroline was of the same generation as Elvire—she must have had the same way of greeting people as Madame Charles.

It is probable that Baudelaire, politically excited as he then was, must have felt a certain contempt for the distinction with which his step-father was honoured, and all the more so as the reaction was then in full swing. Humanitarian hopes were scattered with the autumn leaves. M. Aupick's nomination, though it was the work of Lamartine, that angelic patron of the Revolution, took on a symbolical significance. Whilst Baudelaire was amongst the rebels, his step-father had been reaping titles and honours. As the poet had written in the second and last number of the *Salut Public*, on February 28th, four days after the revolution : " You may be certain that the man who can climb a minister's staircase so adroitly was not present at the barricades."

And what about Mme. Aupick ? Had she no regret at leaving Paris ? Assuredly she was pleased at what had happened to her, she was grateful to her husband, to the minister, to everyone, for a favour on which she might pride herself. Baudelaire thought that he had every reason to say that his mother had always abandoned him.

Yet here again he was unjust. Maxime du Camp, on his way through Constantinople in November 1850, was

received at the French embassy by General Aupick and his wife. The General, out of politeness, asked du Camp if there had been any good recruit (the word is his) to literature during the last two years. Du Camp, knowing nothing of the particular circumstances of the Aupick family, mentioned Baudelaire. It was what is called "an awful brick." The General frowned and stared fixedly at his guest as if he suspected an affront, while an officer of his suite made despairing signals to du Camp from behind his chief's back. The ambassadress managed to control herself, and she remained silent throughout the whole scene. But a few minutes later, drawing the visitor into a corner of the room, she said; "He really has got talent, hasn't he?"—words which are nothing in themselves, but which on reflection may appear heart-rending.

In Paris the ranks of the enthusiasts had been decimated by the events of June. Louis Ménard, in indignation, returned to the mood of his *Prométhée*, and wrote in tribute to the victims of General Cavaignac, the republican dictator:

> Puisque vos ennemis couronnent d'immortelles
> Le cerceuil triomphal où reposent leurs morts,
> Pendant que, sans honneurs, entassés pêle-mêle,
> Dans la fosse commune on va jeter vos corps,
> Recevez le tribut de nos larmes muettes . . .[1]

The poem, which was called *Gloria Victis*, appeared in Proudhon's paper, *Le Peuple*. Louis Ménard, prosecuted together with the paper, was, on April 7th, 1849, sentenced to fifteen months' imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 francs. He escaped to England, and from there reached Brussels.

[1] Since your enemies are crowning with everlasting flowers the triumphal coffin where their dead rest, while, unhonoured, heaped up pell-mell, your bodies are to be flung into the common burial-pit, accept the tribute of our silent tears.

He was pardoned in 1852, returned to Paris, and for some time seemed to have no interest for anything but painting. He had so often in the past hunted snakes in the Forest of Fontainebleau that the desire now came to him to paint the forest itself, and to this end he went to live at Barbizon.

Prudhon, too, had been overthrown. He, though, was a revolutionary on a different scale from the charming Ménard ; one who, by his birth, his austerity, his innocence and his powers of work, reminds us very much of Péguy. He had even two other of Péguy's characteristics which did him much more harm than they did Péguy, for in politics they are fatal : they were, the inability to descend to stratagems and compromises and, a still graver flaw, particularly in a French political assembly, a monotonous delivery.

Baudelaire chanced to meet Prudhon in 1848. One evening when the poet had gone to find Citizen Viard, one of his friends, at the offices of *Le Représentant du Peuple* (Prudhon's first paper, which was suppressed after having been seized three times and suspended once, and then replaced by *Le Peuple*), he found the editor surrounded by his collaborators, giving out in a friendly way instructions and advice about the next day's issue. Jaurès was doing the same thing on the day of his death, at *L'Humanité*.

When the contributors had gone, Prudhon and Baudelaire began to talk. " Citizen," said Prudhon, " it is now dinner-time. Would you like us to have dinner together ? " They went to a small eating-house in the rue Neuve-Vivienne. Prudhon talked a great deal, less from the need to unbosom himself to this stranger than from the pleasure of developing his meditations aloud ; with the intention too, perhaps, of trying-out his doctrine on this touch-stone whom chance had brought him and who, it seemed to him, might be responsive.

If it ever came into his head, between two theories of

political economy, to ask Baudelaire what his occupation was, he might quite well have informed him what his own ideas on poetry and metrics were ; for he had them, he had ideas on everything, even on questions of Hebrew, a language which he had taught himself without any assistance whilst he was a printer at Besançon.

This son of a journeyman brewer and an " heroic " peasant woman (like Péguy's own mother), was an engaging character. Baudelaire felt his power. He appreciated his simple greatness. There is, in truth, nothing finer than a child of the people who has raised himself by his own strength, who in raising himself has remained uncontaminated, and who is inspired by a noble faith.

However, Baudelaire drank a lot and ate only a little. Prudhon drank little and ate enormously. The poet expressed his surprise at the amount of nourishment the representative of the people swallowed. " It is because I have great things to get done," the other answered simply. The meal over, when Baudelaire called the waiter to pay the bill for them both, Prudhon objected and pulled out his own purse. But Baudelaire was surprised to find that Prudhon only paid for his own dinner. Later, Baudelaire was to say of Prudhon : " When he has a pen in his hand he is a stout fellow, but he is hardly a dandy."

Soon the newspaper *Le Peuple* was also suppressed. Prudhon was arrested on June 5th, 1849 (with the authorisation of the Assembly, since he was a member) and sentenced by the *Cour d'assises* to three year's imprisonment. His political career was at an end.

As to the poet, his citizenly ardour had cooled down a long time since. He had discarded the red cravat and the democratic blouse, the blouse that he liked to wear with linen of dazzling white.

An attempt at political journalism in the provinces, in Indre, at the end of 1848, had not succeeded any better

than the launching of the *Salut Public* in Paris. If we are to believe Arthur Ponroy, Baudelaire, by his paradoxes, must have at once shocked and infuriated the subscribers to the paper. What was this paper ? Perhaps *Le Représentant de l'Indre*, a bi-weekly founded in October 1848 for the defence of the conservative interests, and of which Arthur Ponroy became editor in 1850. We owe this hypothesis to our friend René Johannet, who has consulted the documents in the archives at Châteauroux and has discussed the problem with M. Hubert, keeper of the records to the town. In the first number of *Le Représentant*, dated October 20th, 1848, Johannet has discovered an article called *Actuellement*, which seems to me quite in the peremptory, " superior " tone of the dogmatic Baudelaire. Ponroy mentioned a sentence in Baudelaire's first article which would have created a scandal, and this sentence may have been the following : " When Marat, that gentle man, and Robespierre, that fastidious man, demanded, the former three hundred thousand heads, and the latter, the permanent guillotine, they were obeying the ineluctable logic of their policy." The sentence referred to by Ponroy is not to be found in this article, but if it be admitted that it may have been suppressed whilst still in proof, one can clearly see the precise place at which it would have come. It would have been after this paragraph : " What is the Parisian populace saying to-day, with its cynical and instructive raillery : ' They have abolished the death-penalty because they do not know how to organise labour ! ' And this imposed-on people might add, ' Pull down the guillotine, but do not put the lock-out in its place.' "

Besides, it is certain that Baudelaire was preoccupied with the question of capital punishment, for we read in the *Journaux intimes :* " The death-penalty is founded on a mystical idea of which there is absolutely no understanding to-day." Further, in the article in *Le Représentant* I would

point to these words : " The insurrection was *legitimate*—so is assassination," which should be compared with the reflection I have already quoted from the *Journaux intimes :* " May 15th, always this appetite for destruction, a *legitimate* appetite, if everything that is natural is *legitimate.*"

So it is quite possible that the Châteauroux paper in which Baudelaire collaborated was really *Le Représentant de l'Indre*, which supported Cavaignac's candidature. It is also possible that the article which appeared in the first number with the title *Actuellement* was written by the poet. But these are no more than plausible hypotheses ; decisive proof is as yet lacking.

However, the undertaking had no consequences. The hoaxer, if hoaxer there was, was turned off.

In the last months of 1851, the poet was once more to be found with his friends Pierre Dupont and La Chambaudie, amongst the contributors to *La République du peuple, almanach démocratique.* This publication is even registered in the *Journal de la librairie*, with the note : " Baudelaire, Manager." But Baudelaire's part in the Almanach seems to have been exclusively literary. Only one short poem, *l'Ame du vin*, appeared under his name.

After the Coup d'État, during the two days that followed, the poet knew what it was to be under fire, he says ; but this does not mean to say that he did any shooting. He writes in his note-book : " Another Bonaparte ! How shameful ! And yet everything has quieted down ! " He was filled with disgust for this useless agitation, and his destiny reclaimed him. He was, to use his own expression, " unpoliticked."

PART THREE

Rien n'égale en longueur les boiteuses journées.

CHAPTER ONE

From Pillar to Post

Hélas ! tout est abîme, action, désir, rêve.

IN Baudelaire everything is complex. Anti-republican on the eve of 1848, he threw himself into the insurrection ; one of the founders of the *Salut Public*, one of the June rioters, he yet offered his services in the same year to a reactionary newspaper. For whether or no it was *Le Représentant de l'Indre*, the Châteauroux paper with which Baudelaire was connected was certainly reactionary. There can be no doubt of this when we know that some of the expenses of his journey to Indre were met by an advance from his Excellency General Aupick, through the intermediary of M. Ancelle, a fact which the poet only discovered later, when it made him furious.

Yet it is right to point out that Baudelaire, being of no party, could at least be sure that by his changes of opinion he did not betray anyone. But, it will be objected, he betrayed his own opinions. Perhaps less than one imagines : we must not attach too much importance to the provocative cynicism of certain of his admissions. In politics Baude-

laire is what is called a " Wild Man." He might be in agreement with this or that point in the most contrary systems whilst repudiating others ; his adherences, like his rejections, always took a violent form.

There is hardly any matter of public opinion which, in regard to simple good sense, has not much to be said both for and against it : Baudelaire quickly discerned the two positions, the two theses ; he dissociated the points of view and accepted nothing without reserve, whilst in the minds of professional politicians and their followers questions are often all lumped together.

This amounts to saying that it was only in particular cases, in specific questions, that Baudelaire had definite political opinions. But then they were extraordinarily clear-sighted ! How much wisdom there was in this feverish mind ! How intelligent this poet was ! He could, even in the political arena where freedom of mind is so rare, stifle his antipathies in order to allow nothing to enter into his judgments except the essential virtue of judgment : lucidity. If an example is required, emotionally the character of Louis Napoleon only roused in Baudelaire hatred, rage and contempt, yet in 1852, he testifies none the less to what he called the " providentiality " of the prince-president, the emperor to be. Or again, could there be a better formula than this in which Baudelaire, on the eve of the war with Italy, summed up the position of France : " The difficulty will be in the making use of victory."

And yet, even admitting that the poet is to be reproached with political inconstancy, it does not appear that a single one of his changes of face was dictated by self-interest. " I have no convictions," he wrote, " as they are understood by the people of my century. There is no basis in me for conviction, because I have no ambition. Brigands are convinced—of what ?—that they must succeed." Nothing, in fact, goes so far to prove that Baudelaire was disinterested

as his behaviour at Châteauroux ; an intriguer would have been cleverer.

And there is something else. Not only was Baudelaire's changeableness in politics more apparent than real, but, if one sets aside the various systems which, whatever they were, never entirely satisfied him, one will find in Baudelaire a fixed point, a profound, unalterable feeling, all the truer, all the more human since it was independent of any sectarian spirit ; that is to say, his pity for the poor. This pity shines out in many places in his poetry. But it is to be found still quivering from the shock of recent deception, in a preface which the poet wrote in 1852 for the songs of his friend Pierre Dupont, once a Lyons silk-weaver.

Yes, certainly from this date Baudelaire showed nothing but scorn for democratic theories ; he made fun of what he amusingly calls " the democrat's peeved and sullen stare " ; he went as far as to insult the exiles of December 2nd, who refused the amnesty proclaimed in 1852 by the Imperial Government ; and, what is no longer amusing but even very disagreeable, he called them " old fools," " old goody-goodies," " old La Palisses," " good-for-nothings," " old dry-as-dusts." Yet even so, we must not lose sight of the fact that it was only the doctrines of humanitarianism and its followers that the poet held in horror. His tenderness for the poor, for the disinherited, which dates back to the time when he used to walk about among the Lyons weavers, had in no way diminished. A dandy he was, perhaps, but not old and dried-up ; a dandy who never ceased to feel the most ardent sympathy for any kind of suffering.

The period of disturbance had come to an end and order was restored all over the country. After the High Court of Bourges, joint commissions had made sad ravages in the republican ranks. Raspail, Blanqui and Barbès were in

the cells of Belle-Ile-en-Mer. Victor Hugo had taken refuge in Guernsey. As for the people of the *faubourgs*, become indifferent to the fate of the Assembly that had had them massacred in June 1848, on the 2nd of December, 1851, they " went on playing billiards," as Prudhon so aptly remarked.

The social machine, then, thrown out of order for a moment, had recovered its equilibrium, which meant for Baudelaire personally and most importantly, that the bills he had been so imprudent as to sign, again began to fall due regularly. As a matter of fact, the intoxicating, miraculous disorder which had freed the hunted man from his constant anxiety, had only lasted a few weeks. The bailiffs had not waited for the prince-president's violent measures to resume the pursuit, nor the money-lenders either. Long before he had voted " yes " in the plebiscite, Arondel had continued his relentless persecution.

Baudelaire now realized that changes of address in Paris itself were not enough to put his creditors off his track. It was necessary to leave the capital, so he decided to go to ground in the provinces for a time, where he would write two or three books in peace. At least he would not be seen in Paris again till he had laid up a good stock of work, the proceeds from which would enable him to settle the most urgent debts on his return. He had had enough of journalism and of polemics ; the revolutionary blouse and the artist's smock, relic of the transition period, had both been sold to the old-clothes man. His moustache and beard, which were really too agressive, he had shaved off, and as a token of his great resolution, he had had his hair cropped short.

From now on, his plans were mapped out ; he would return to literature with a novel. But a fig for the " novel of virtue," as he will call it a little later in an article entitled *Les drames et les romans honnêtes !* " Vices must be

painted as they are." Had he not already made notes of a series of subjects in perfect keeping with this programme ? *Les Enseignements d'un monstre*, *La Maîtresse vierge*, *Le Crime au collège*, *Les Monstres*, *Les Tribades*, *L'Amour parricide*, *Une Infâme adorée*, *La Maîtresse de l'Idiot*, *L'Entreteneur*, *La Femme malhonnête* . . . etc. Really the only difficulty was to choose, especially as there was an infallible method of bringing one's task to completion, which was to open with some very fine phrases which would give one the desire to go on. . . .

That is what was planned ; what really happened is this. Baudelaire left for Dijon alone. He arrived there on a winter day, terribly bored. All at once, the quietness of the country moved him deeply. He intended to take a small apartment, hire some furniture and then send for Jeanne to keep house for him. In the meantime, he went to an hotel. The days that followed were stupefying, with no friend nor any possible intercourse, apart from the conversation at the dining-table, which quickly became unbearable. The poet soon chose to have his meals served in his room, an unusual requirement which the proprietress of the hotel considered for some reason very suspicious.

Landladies had been the poet's bugbear for many years. With them, things always began well and finished badly. At first they greatly appreciated the politeness of their well-dressed client. Then, when that happened which inevitably happened sooner or later, that is, when the bill for two weeks running remained unpaid, every trace of a smile vanished from the woman's face and the trouble began.

This time, however, Baudelaire had money. But, in his room, did he work ? How could he, when his neighbours were commercial travellers who got up early and started whistling just as he was dozing off ? When he got up at mid-day he was still in need of sleep. He was

not in the mood. To throw off his torpor he would have to go for a stroll in the town towards evening, to the café. But the dreary click of billiard balls, the sight of some hussar curling his moustache at the girl behind the bar, were no comfort to a lonely man preyed upon by melancholy. And perhaps, at such a moment Baudelaire would think of his heartless mother, going with her friends to see the cemetery of Eyoub, in a caïque, across the magic moon-lit waters of the Golden Horn. Irritated and hopeless, he would make his way back to the hotel, through the empty streets. Stumblingly he would wander past the surly-looking houses with their closed shutters, and lose himself in the unlighted maze of the town. At last he would hear the bells of the omnibuses, and see in the distance the lighted entrance to the hotel, where the night-porter, with a yawn, would hand him the key of his room.

And then there was but one resource; the laudanum bottle. But as a result of increasing the dose, his stomach had been upset. Then Baudelaire used to spend the day in bed. And suddenly, as a crowning misfortune, the illness that he had been so careful about, that he imagined had been cured ten years ago, broke out again one morning with peculiar symptoms. . . . It usually happens that the events which make up the destiny of a human being have, as it were, a particular and individual colour which is to be found, invariably the same, each time that they recur. In the course of a life-time, happiness, if it comes many times, appears almost always with a similar expression. Trouble and misfortune came back time and again with the same bias, by the same paths. This is because, though there may be decrees outside us which control us, it is just as certain that there are decrees within upon which we are even more dependent: those of our individuality.

Baudelaire had fled from Paris, then, in just the same way as he was to flee fifteen years later. This unhappy stay

at Dijon is, as it were, the prefiguration of the terrible years in Brussels.

Meanwhile, the poet could stand it no longer. Before he had even looked round for rooms he decided to send for Jeanne. He wrote to her to join him at the hotel immediately, but first of all to go to Neuilly to ask Ancelle for an advance.

The relations of the prodigal with his trustee had by no means improved during the last few weeks. The lawyer had held his ground, he retained all his sententious sympathy for his client, but continued to turn a deaf ear to every irregular request ; and now Baudelaire's exasperation with this attitude reached a climax.

And lately, besides, the writer's revolutionary ideas, his behaviour during the rising, had scandalised the lawyer, friend of social order that he was. And as both men were loquacious and fond of arguing, violent discussions had taken place every time they had met in 1848.

But these collisions had really drawn them towards one another to an extent they were unaware of. M. Ancelle, whilst disapproving of his young friend's paradoxes, began to enjoy the stupefaction they caused him. Baudelaire, for his part, did not cease to be impressed by all that was unchangeable in the mind—and in the heart—of this old public servant. No doubt, without suspecting it, he began to be fond of him, for from this period he dropped his politeness towards him.

Jeanne's attempt not having yielded anything, the poet wrote a letter to his lawyer from Dijon, which we still possess ; it is extremely uncivil. What indeed could be ruder than to accuse such a man as M. Ancelle of inattention and lack of seriousness ? To flout him was to flout all the exactitude and all the weighty judgment of the middle-classes.

When Baudelaire says to this lawyer, who is besides

town-councillor, justice of the peace and mayor of his town, " you are a great child," the jeer is launched against a whole class of society, the very one that in 1848 had acted so promptly against the rising, in June had defended its new position so savagely, the class which was about to throw itself, with the impulsiveness of fear, into the arms of the " saviour."

But what infuriated the poet most of all, was the fact that Ancelle presumed to disapprove of the grudge which this son, who claimed to have been abandoned, harboured against his mother. Then he would taunt the old " scrivener " with his *sentimentalism*, a word which probably implied : " Your traditional feelings are the accepted ones ; what do you understand about the passionate love that I have, that I had, rather, for my mother ? Keep your platitudes about family feeling for the days when, girt with your mayoral scarf of office, in the registry-office of Neuilly, you address your paternal homily to the newly-married couples."

And it seems besides, that on the occasion Jeanne visited him, the lawyer did not receive the young lady with all the respect due to her rank, that of a poet's mistress, or rather his concubine, to speak M. Ancelle's language. " The child of dark midnights," on arriving at Dijon empty-handed, must have complained to her lover of a lack of respect which had increased the discomfiture of her useless application. Certainly the interview between the substantial bourgeois, inspired with the sense of his respectability, and the negress, must have had a flavour of its own. There could never, we may be sure, have been a loftier stare than that with which Maître Ancelle received one morning in his private office this unexpected visitor—hence these vindictive lines of Baudelaire's : " I must beg you, if in future you should have any occasion to meet Mlle. Lemer again," (at this period Jeanne Duval called

herself Lemer ; later she took the name of Prosper, no doubt to put her own creditors off the scent) " do not trifle with her again, do not talk so much, and " (this is the finishing touch) " be more sedate."

But at Dijon, too, the arrival of the same Mlle. Lemer must have caused considerable surprise. What did the proprietress of the hotel think of her ? Did not the presence of such a woman endanger the reputation of the house ? One can easily imagine the secret consultations between the offended lady and her husband when he came up from the kitchen, his white cap over his ear ; the tittle-tattle of the servants passing from floor to floor ; and, in the town itself, when the strange creature went by, " sweeping the air with her wide skirts," the whispering on the door-steps.

In short, the rooms and the furniture were never hired, and as the hotel cost 12 francs a day with board, for two people, which was a high price at the period considering the low cost of food generally, such an expensive retirement could not last long. And on top of that, the poet was dying of boredom, and Jeanne no less, since she was more closely under watch than in Paris and had not even the opportunity, however much she may have desired it, of amusing herself by signalling from her window to the hussars of the garrison.

A little while later, the couple were on their way back to Paris. Baudelaire had not even written the first sentence of his novel, that first sentence which was to have been so beautiful as to have compelled him irresistibly to go on.

CHAPTER TWO

The Prisoner of Circumstances and of his Self

Et le temps m'engloutit minute par minute.

IN THE summer of 1851 there were many changes in the Embassies. General Aupick moved from Constantinople to Madrid. Before taking up his appointment he stayed in Paris with his wife, in June, at the hôtel du Danube, rue Richepanse. Whilst his mother was away Baudelaire might well be unable to give up the idea that she was *guilty*, as he had maintained just before to the alarm of M. Ancelle, but all the accusations collapsed the very moment the criminal came back.

The walks together began again in the fine weather. The reconciled lovers went one day as far as Saint-Cloud, another day as far as Versailles. Later the poet retained an affecting memory of these sacred hours. Did he not go so far as to repeat to himself in his solitude, in order to glut himself with bitterness and regret, the very exclamations his mother had made about the country-side—" How beautiful it is, but you do not feel the beauties of nature." Unhappily the truce was a very short one ; the ambassador and his wife soon left for Madrid.

Baudelaire and Jeanne were now living wholly together, at 25 rue du Marais-du-Temple for the moment. Of his poetical work he hardly ever spoke, even though his letters and conversation were chiefly filled with plans that came to nothing.

At long intervals, during these last years, he had published poems in a few reviews, which often, from their titles (such as *Le Messager de l'assemblée*, where nine poems in succession appeared in 1851, *la Mort des artistes* among others, and *la Mort des amants*) seem to have had nothing

specifically literary about them, and lead us to think that the poet had no option, and that his verses, when they were accepted, were inserted as " miscellanies " of no importance.

Amail, editor of the *Revue politique*, a grim saint-simonian to whom Baudelaire had had the nerve to offer certain poems, made him this reply : " *We* do not publish fancy-things of that kind."

In 1852, the poet sent Théophile Gautier a series of twelve poems which had been revised a hundred times and of which more than one had been written six or eight years before, in order that he should bring them to the attention of some literary pontiff ; but this does not seem to have led to anything.

Yet, if Baudelaire was still unknown to the public as a poet, from this period he was famous as such in the literary coteries and editorial offices of small papers. Numbers of artists and writers had often heard him read certain of his poems, at the dinners of Philoxène Boyer especially.

This Philoxène was an amiable young man who had come from Grenoble to Paris equipped with some small fortune, and taken it into his head to achieve fame by giving suppers to the celebrities of the day. These feasts sometimes took place in swell cabarets, and then the host was obliged to pay in advance, so incredible did it seem to fashionable restaurant-keepers in those days that a literary man would be able to settle a heavy bill. But most often this gorgeous young man received his friends in the rooms of some friendly courtesan. If Léontine or Agathe had taken new lodgings in the Boulevard du Temple, the house-warming was sure to be at Philoxène's expense.

Gavarni's drawings, with their fantastic titles, give the colour and atmosphere of these little festivities, except that they did not take place only in Carnival time and went on for at least two and perhaps three years. Théophile Gautier said that Philoxène Boyer had invented a new

form of criticism : ecstatic criticism. This rare creature who loved to admire and entertain his fellow artists, died, as was to be expected, in destitution and neglect.

The poems Baudelaire was most often asked to recite at these dinners were those which by their violent colouring most startled the bohemians and their girl-friends and, at bottom, perhaps even scandalised them a little : *la Charogne*, *le Vin de l'assassin*, *Delphine et Hippolyte*. In the end, all Philoxène's intimate friends knew these few poems by heart. Thus the true Baudelaire, he whom our contemporaries have not ceased to investigate, was not recognised, was unknown, even in those restricted circles where, however, the poet was already the subject of attention. To some, the writer appeared a rarity of the erotic species ; to others, the more perceptive, a disciple of Mathurin Régnier ; but the individual, heart-rending note of this unsentimental poetry was not even guessed at by anyone.

At this period in Baudelaire's career, I mean in that part of his unhappy life that is visible to everyone, plans succeeded plans. He himself, by then, called them dreams, so accustomed had he become to disillusionment. Yet, without having complete trust in his fantasies, he spoke and acted as if he firmly believed in them, as indeed he had to. In face of his creditors, first of all, in order to obtain fresh respites, to wring new loans. In face of Ancelle, and of Mme. Aupick next, unless he was to admit that they, the General's tribe, had been right in the beginning, when they prophesied the danger of a literary career. Finally it was of importance to Baudelaire himself to be to some extent the dupe of his projects. By means of this mental ruse he escaped absolute discouragement, and kept his mind in an intermediate condition between the hope that it became more and more difficult for him to entertain

sincerely, and the fear, unfortunately only too justified, of the morrow. But how unstable this equilibrium was! How exhausting this ceaseless interior pleading to try and convince oneself, for some few days, that such an inconsistent combination might nevertheless be successful!

It was at this time that Baudelaire, with Champfleury and Monselet, started *La Semaine théâtrale* (which only ran for nine numbers), and afterwards drew up a programme for a new literary paper, *Le Hibou philosophe*, which was never issued. He even counted, or pretended to count, as realities the most extravagant promises, the vaguest café talk, like Amic's offering one day to advance him 22,000 francs to found a big review. He immediately wrote to Ancelle for the pleasure of astounding his trustee with the news of this stroke of luck; but, almost as soon as he had announced the scheme, he himself realised its emptiness, and at the same moment guessed with what an incredulous and harrowing smile the lawyer would receive next day that phantasmagoric piece of news. So he added these words, where such a sad clear-sightedness breaks through the self-willed illusions: "I have re-read my letter, and I think it is bound to seem insane to you. It will always be so."

There is, it may be, less suffering in actual madness than in the laborious constructions of logic by means of which Baudelaire vainly sought for an outlet from his perpetual money troubles. Madness drove Gérard de Nerval to suicide, and it was a miserable end, his hanging himself in the rue de la Vieille-Lanterne, in January 1855. The whole of the literary world was saddened by it, for the victim had none but friends there. But, if one leaves out of account this sinister epilogue, how light and almost radiant Gérard's destiny seems, compared with that of Baudelaire. It was the life of a madman, perhaps, but after all it was not so foolish and was, in any case, free from anxiety. The madness of

Gérard was his having no attachments to anything, his continual evasion. Gérard was the guest who slips away before the others begin to yawn. He was here a moment ago, now he is on the way to Vienna, in a month he will be at Constantinople. His old father, who loved him and whom he worshipped, continued to have a place laid for him at dinner every Sunday, saying : " Perhaps that will bring him back." And, in fact, Gérard had for many years come back, always without warning. He would embrace his father as if he had seen him the evening before and then once more vanish like a dream.

Even in the years when his mental condition required special attention, his eccentricities retained something gratuitous, detached and harmless, like wearing tie-pins made of gilt paper, or walking in the Palais-Royale leading a lobster on the end of a blue ribbon. " Why is a lobster any more ridiculous than a dog ? " he used to say, " I have a liking for lobsters. They are quiet and thoughtful, they know the secrets of the sea and they don't bark."

Gérard's loves, too, have something of dream and myth about them, of flights to fabulous countries. Had not this gentle, retiring man, who blushed like a girl, acquired a monumental renaissance bed to shelter the object of his passion ? During the nomad's wanderings this cumbersome piece of furniture was looked after by friends. Théophile Gautier, who tells the story, had charge of it for a long time. " We should have had to retire at the solemn moment, but the goddess for whom this temple was built never alighted there."

In Baudelaire's life, on the contrary, everything turned to fetters, the convict's chain and ball. For him, his bed, though it was raised on a dais, was not a throne for fantastic loves ; it was (at 57 rue de la Seine, for the moment), a miserable couch for a drink-sodden negress and an overwrought man exhausted by a day filled with insistent

demands for money. With time, the "brown body" had grown coarse. Everything had been said, that is to say, all the poems that this "vaunted body" could inspire, had been written, and nothing was left but this flabby flesh, like an empty wineskin.

A scruple, however, prevented the poet from breaking with his companion. He considered that he no longer had the right to do so after the ten years of their common life. The chains of habit, also, restrained him more than he thought, perhaps, but he suffered none the less to feel himself bound. The irremediable vulgarity of Jeanne, her betrayals (for she betrayed him with his hairdresser, with the lowest sorts of men), her vices, her lies, like a perverse grown-up child's, all this sickened Baudelaire, but he endured it. At least, up till this time he had endured it, though not without impatience.

One of the things that especially aggravated him in his mistress was, that she did not admire him, that she would have thrown his manuscripts into the fire if that would have brought her more money than letting them be published. For Jeanne, indeed, her lover was a failure. And there were days when she told him so, when she in her turn was weary of that continual penury that prevented her even from buying the small pieces of finery she took a fancy to.

And further, Baudelaire loved conversation, and it was impossible for him to exchange a word with this creature, not merely on literary matters but even on the most commonplace political topics. Jeanne was literally not interested in anything, and she had no wish to learn anything, though the poet had at many different times suggested that he should give her lessons.

This savage, too, was cunningly and subtly spiteful. She poisoned the cat that was Baudelaire's only diversion at home; and brought dogs into his lodgings because she knew that the sight of them made him feel ill.

Sometimes, after some excess of drink on one side or the other, violent quarrels would break out between the lovers. Then there would be shouting and fighting, and furniture overturned, and the neighbours would knock on the ceiling to make the furious couple be quiet. " Really," Baudelaire wrote to his mother, " I am thankful that there was no weapon in the room." He was referring to one terrible night when the image of murder had passed before his eyes. And what was worse, he had begun to yield to the frenzy ; he grasped a candle-stick, his arm rose and fell, and blood spurted out on to the pillow.

CHAPTER THREE

The Discovery of a Brother

Le rêveur que l'horreur de son logis réveille.

"A LITTLE work repeated three-hundred-and-sixty-five times gives three-hundred-and-sixty-five times a little money, an enormous sum. And at the same time fame is achieved." This sentence from the *Journaux intimes* is something like Pascal's famous bet. Baudelaire also wanted to attain faith by the ways of reason—faith in regular work. To assure himself that this religion was at one with his own interest, he found this formula, of such a mathematical precision that it left his mind no loop-hole of escape. But in spite of his theorem, in two years the poet only published two articles : *Morale du joujou* (in the *Monde littéraire*) and *De l'essence du rire.*

Meanwhile Mme. Aupick had returned to Paris, for the General had retired from the Embassy in 1853. The poor of Madrid, if one can believe the papers, deeply regretted the departure of the French ambassadress. Perhaps this was no more than one of those formal expressions of politeness that are usually circulated by the news-agencies in such circumstances. But, whether that was so or not, the compliment awoke the most painful feelings in Baudelaire, all the more painful since he felt them to be sordid, and was ashamed of them. His mother had been indulging in charity at Madrid, while in Paris, he . . . At last, however, she had returned. No longer worried by her Spanish beggars, she would be able to give more attention to a poor man who was nearer to her. So thought her embittered son.

As to the General, as one may imagine, Napoleon III had not accepted his resignation without conferring new

rewards upon him. M. Aupick had been promoted Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour and was made a Senator of the Empire. And further, the department of the Nord had elected him as Conseilleur-Général ; and, as everyone knows, when a man's home-county declares itself proud of having been his birth-place, it is a sign that his triumph is universally admitted.

But what was happening to Baudelaire ? Without losing interest in Jeanne's fate, for he still continued to help her as liberally as he could, he was for the present living alone. Nor was this the only change in his habits. Incredible as it may sound, he was working, working assiduously, furiously. And what had caused this miracle ? A new passion ; for it is only a passionate experience that can completely change a man's life. What neither remorse nor the most rigorous reasoning could effect, was brought about by a chance meeting ; a meeting with an unknown brother, a fellow, though of another country and another race. This far-away relative suddenly made known to him, had died in 1849, but his work remained, a living thing ; and this spirit, this twin spirit, alert and logical and electrical, transmitted to him, through a foreign language, a light that lit up the darkness. Baudelaire had discovered Poe.

Who can say which are the real people, which the phantoms in our lives ? Surely the human beings with whom we rub shoulders every day are sometimes only shadows for us ! There was hardly a well-known writer in France whom Baudelaire did not know personally, or had not met once at least. Balzac was dead : but when still quite a young man the poet had introduced himself to him in the street one day, and had frequently met him afterwards. And Victor Hugo, now an exile ? In days gone by Baudelaire had more than once been to see him in the

Place Royale, and later in his flat in the rue de la Tour d'Auvergne, where in 1852 the furniture had been sold up by public auction. Théophile Gautier, whom Baudelaire called the Magician, had for a long time been his friend. Sainte-Beuve, to whom he had sent some poems as early as 1844, was kindly disposed towards him. And Delacroix, to whose studio the poet had often been admitted by Jenny, the master's tyrannical house-keeper, was prepared to consider his advice. These, of course, were men whose talent, whose genius one may say in some cases, could not be denied. But he had friends and fellow-artists besides, who were true poets and good writers : the happy-natured Banville ; Barbey d'Aurévilly ; the " old spoilt child," Flaubert who, in his retreat at Croisset, was working at a novel of provincial life ; and Leconte de Lisle, so proudly pessimistic, so imperturbable, who had declared recently to Ménard : " You say no one has read your poetry, unless it is I ? Who the devil has read mine unless it is you ? What does it matter ! To be depressed by such an ordinary state of things is like complaining that you cannot reach down a star." And besides these men at the top of the tree whom Baudelaire admired (sometimes, as in the case of Hugo, in spite of himself), besides these companions whom he esteemed, there was the whole rabble of literary acquaintances : gossip-writers, pamphleteers, art-critics ; members of Philoxène's dinner-parties (" the cruel little lyricist ") ; the frequenters of the Café Tabourey ; of the Café de la Regence, where Musset used to go for his game of chess ; of the Valois Tavern where Gérard de Nerval used to spend much of his time towards the end of his life ; and of Cousinet's restaurant in the rue du Bac, where there were handshakings and greetings, conventional smiles, a few enthusiasms held in common, but more hatreds, a great deal of noise and a great deal of grimacing.

But where in this motley crowd was he to find a spiritual

brother, one who would appreciate him at his true value because of their resemblance, who would realize him to be a prince in spite of his threadbare coat because he also was an aristocrat beneath his worn-out clothes? Where was this twin, this double of himself, that every artist, without knowing it, spends his whole life looking for? Where was that dandy with the scathing tongue, hiding a virginal soul from everybody's eyes? Where was that man who would drink until he fell into the gutter, and yet know that between his drunkenness and ordinary drunkenness there lay worlds of thought, sensitiveness and sadness, like a mountain-range with snow-capped peaks and deep ravines, who would know his vices because they were his own; one who, like him, remained pure beneath his bespattered cloak; one whom poverty ground down as it preyed upon him, one whom sickness tormented, as it ate into him; one who was pursued through the whirlpool of the streets like the poet's very self, alone, irremediably alone, in every public place, in station waiting-rooms, in bars and concert-halls and theatres, and in the blinding gas-light of the dance-halls? Where could he meet this reflection of himself? Surely it was a feverish dream, a creation of his imagination, the sputtering fumes of his opium pipe, or nothing but the brief, illusory consolation that, with ever-increasing difficulty, he found in his phial of laudanum.

Thus for a long time Baudelaire had believed that his hopes were chimerical. Perhaps he had never even realized that he was searching through time and space for this kind of pendent to his own being, this response to his life, this justification, in fact, and excuse. Perhaps he had never formulated this profound urge of his soul. But, whether consciously or not, it is certain that his whole being desired this meeting, this almost incredible coincid-

ence—is certain, for there is no emotion in his whole life comparable with the one that gripped him on the day when, by a freak of fortune, the mysterious personality of Edgar Poe rose before him for the first time.

This takes us back some years. In 1846, one evening in a public reading-room, he chanced to come across an article in the *Revue des deux mondes*, entitled *Stories by Edgar Allan Poe.* He tells us that his hands began to tremble as they had done that evening in the little Panthéon theatre when he had searched the programme for the name of the mulatto woman. But this time it was no longer the mysterious trembling of physical excitement, the whispering of brutal appetites connected with the obsessing memory of a swarthy back writhing under the lash ; it was a different kind of vibration, an almost musical one, a scale of intellectual affinities, an enigmatic song that rose above the sea three thousand miles away, and called : " Brother ! Brother ! "

I have used the word emotion, but it is not strong enough. Baudelaire, in a letter to Armand Fraisse, says more exactly, " A remarkable disturbance." Fear was mixed with delight. He discovered poems and stories of which he had had vague and confused notions himself, that Poe had known how to combine and bring to perfection. And more, there beneath his eyes Baudelaire found not only subjects that he had dreamed of, but actually phrases (he says) that he had thought about, which the American author had written down twenty years before.

Such coincidences may appear to be improbable and even suspicious; yet in spite of these "accidents," in spite even of the fact that Baudelaire, later, literally borrowed without acknowledgement certain of Poe's ideas (which is called plagiarism), it seems to us that M. Paul Valéry goes much too far when he represents the work of Baudelaire as a kind of application of the American writer's formulas and

suggestions. Certainly his acquaintance with Poe may have fertilised the young writer in the sense that it revealed and clarified in the reasoning, theoretical, systematic part of his intelligence, certain tendencies that he was already aware of; but neither for his sensibility nor poetic invention, nor for his taste, nor for his literary and artistic feeling, was it a really determining influence. The poems and critical essays that Baudelaire had written before 1846-48, and which already bear his stamp, are there to prove it. However rare Poe's value as an aesthetician, as a story-teller and poet, there is nothing in his work so substantial, so full of meat, as the body of Baudelaire's poetry. In comparison with Baudelaire as he now appears to us, a figure of universal meaning for humanity, Poe seems an eccentric. And besides, even if Baudelaire had derived from Poe (which is not the case), to subordinate Baudelaire to Poe would amount to saying that, in poetry, systems outweigh works, it would be to consider the starting-point as more important than the achievement; an error of balance and of judgment.

But to return to this strange conjunction of two great spirits. Unfortunately life is so ordained, the tumult by which we are surrounded is so boisterous, the circumstances which control us are, it would seem, so inevitable in their succession, that nothing is more rare, more exceptional, than a really free act. Baudelaire had heard the distant cry; he knew that somewhere this other self existed; his pulse had quickened, his body trembled at this blinding revelation. But, for years, the din of the outside world had stifled the secret echo in these two souls which had been drawn together for a moment; the flood of vulgarity had obscured the first thrill of emotion. Then came the revolution of '48, which had been a period of frenzied agitation for Baudelaire, when it had seemed as if events had robbed him of what was deepest in him.

One day, however, the magic call was heard again. Edgar Poe was dead now, but it is the privilege of such artists, that for them there is hardly such a thing as death. Baudelaire now wanted to know everything there was to be known about this earthly life of Edgar Poe, that had been consumed in such anguish ; and here a second discovery awaited him, more extraordinary than the first—there were bewildering analogies between his life and Poe's : poverty and drink.

Certainly at no time had Baudelaire looked upon himself as fallen. Always, in the midst of all his worries, his pride had remained unbroken. But others do not see us with our own eyes. Not that I would say they are less indulgent than us, for we are often more severe, more exacting towards ourselves, than anyone else. Others lack this direct, immediate knowledge that comes from an inner feeling and needs no proof. But for all those—his mother, Ancelle, his friends and companions—who could not see in Baudelaire's unhappiness and sufferings, in his faults and even in his vices, a hidden greatness, for all those who could not distinguish the essential order in this apparent lack of order, here was an irrefutable testimony ; another life, one that was so like his own and was also that of a great poet. From this moment he was absolved.

And, moreover, it seemed to him that even those who accused him could find plenty of examples for themselves in the life of Edgar Allan Poe. Mme. Aupick, amongst others, who so often began her letters with these words : " In truth, Charles, you distress me . . . ," might with advantage take as a model Poe's mother-in-law, the mild, indulgent, incomparable Maria Clemm. She might (so thought her son, now become her judge), meditate upon the example of this woman, who always consoled without ever blaming or moralizing, in whom a mother's love, free of all wordly considerations, of all bourgeois

pettiness, was a perpetual adoration joined with an infinite pity.

Baudelaire had learnt English as a child from Caroline, who had been born in London of Parisian parents and spent her early childhood in England. He now again took up the study of this language enthusiastically, for it was through the medium of a foreign idiom that this twin spirit revealed itself to him. It was now his aim, or rather his decision, his determination, to penetrate the subtlest niceties of this mind so akin to his own, and to offer it to, enforce it upon, the admiration of French readers. This was something quite different from the poet's other projects, those lists of articles to be written, those titles for novels jotted down in his note-books.

But Jeanne's bickering made all work at home impossible. To begin with, Baudelaire took refuge in the libraries, even took his dictionaries to the café with him. But soon these days of work were not enough for him. He needed his evenings and his nights, long periods of silence, when he might have full leisure to pursue his ardent intercourse with this mind that had claimed him. For Jeanne it meant good-bye. It was useless for her to expostulate; indeed, in his new calmness, she hardly recognized her lover. With tranquill assurance, he who was usually so violent gave notice to the concierge, collected all his papers and went away.

The translator now went to live by himself, first at 10 rue de Babylone, then at 60 rue Pigalle, on the ground-floor. He used to leave the key in the lock so that he should not be disturbed by the ringing of the bell. If anyone came in they found him bent over the *Tales of Mystery*, the sacred text that he was deciphering with the devotion of a brahmin. At the noise that his visitors made, he did not even look up. If they spoke to him he did not answer.

In 1848 Baudelaire had only published one thing by Poe, *Révélation magnétique*, which came out in *La Liberté de penser*. Now he could scarcely understand how he had been content with so little, and wanted to translate everything, gladly asking pardon of the spirit he had at last met again and which was now yielding itself to him. In 1852, he had already given the *Revue de Paris* a commentary on the work of the American author : *Edgar Allan Poe ; sa vie et ses ouvrages*. But it was not until 1852 that he began in *Le Pays*, the series of his masterly translations. These were preceded by a respectful and affectionate dedication to Maria Clemm, at Milford, Connecticut, U.S.A. There is in this dedication a marvellous tone of spiritual harmony and supra-sensible understanding. It was, he said, the " message of a soul to a soul," a veritable communion in the being of the dead genius, of the poor Eddie whose wounds had been so often tended by the gentle Maria Clemm, and whom Baudelaire had now determined to make known to France.

In 1855, the translator often used to give a story a day to *Le Pays*. Asselineau tells us how, when he used to go to see his friend rather late in the evening, he would often find the printer's boy asleep in a corner of the room, so long did Baudelaire, stooping over his work, make him wait for the copy or the proofs he had been sent to bring back.

Asselineau also says that it was a case of real possession. Baudelaire could do nothing but think and speak of Poe. He used to ask everyone he met if they knew his author, and if they did not, would become enraged. One day Asselineau went with him to an hotel on the Boulevard des Capucines where, they had been told, an American writer had arrived who must have known Poe. The two friends found the traveller in his shirt and pants, surrounded by shoes of all sizes and shapes which he was trying on with the assistance of a boot-maker. But Baudelaire did not give

him a moment's respite. His interrogation began between a pair of shoes and a pair of pumps. Unfortunately the American did not like Poe. " He had a peculiar mind," he said, " and his conversation was not at all *consecootive*." Baudelaire left in a fury and, violently cramming his hat on to his head, shouted out : " He's only a Yankee ! "

But where, it seems to me, the excellent Asselineau was a little taken in by his friend's habitually mystifying ways, is when he seriously asserts that for a long time the translator made an English publican in the rue de Rivoli his adviser on questions of language. I know that Malherbe did not disdain to accept the authority of the porters in the corn-market ; but that was only the whim of a grammarian, and cannot be taken altogether seriously except in the case of certain locutions, certain tricks of speech which, indeed, only keep their original bite amongst the people. At the English tavern that Baudelaire frequented, the whiskey was good and that counts for something. And also, like Huysmans's hero, for whom it was enough to have spent an hour in a bar to have the impression of having been to London, perhaps Baudelaire, amongst the grooms of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, dreamed that he was at Baltimore, where he had come to pray at the tomb of the beloved and unfortunate Poe.

CHAPTER FOUR

Spleen, Debauches and Pure Love

Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle.

IN SPITE of the success gained by the publication of the *Histoires extraordinaires* in *Le Pays*, Baudelaire had much difficulty in finding a publisher for his translation. The stories, cut out and pasted on sheets of brown paper, the margin often filled with corrections, were carefully collected in a large green portfolio which, Asselineau states, passed from one publishing firm to another, to Lecou, to Hachette and others, before finally coming to rest at Michel Lévy's, in the rue Vivienne.

The first volume came out in April 1856. The second, *Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires* in the following year. The *Aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym* which was published serially in the *Moniteur universel*, followed in book form in 1858, then *Eurèka* in 1863 and the *Histoires grotesques et sérieuses* in 1865.

Baudelaire's first translation had been made in 1848, so that this task had been spread out over a space of seventeen years. Evidently, whatever Baudelaire's enthusiasm for Poe, the period of *illumination*, as I shall call it, could not have lasted all that time. But, at least the translator's care, scrupulousness, and artistic endeavour never slackened. In that, too, Baudelaire deserves to be quoted as a noble example. His case is so exceptional even, that his translation, equal, or as some claim, superior to the original, is a unique work in our literature. But Baudelaire's personal destiny had to be fulfilled. His own work called him and at the same time his endless troubles began to harry him again.

In the Spring of 1855 the first *Exposition Universel* was

opened and the poet was commissioned to write a series of articles on the Art Section of this exhibition. His critical mastery is displayed once more in these essays. No one in France before Baudelaire had written of painting with such penetration, for Diderot's *Salons* were literary or philosophical; Baudelaire was technical. And I can think of hardly anyone since who can bear comparison with him except Fromentin, in his *Maîtres d'autrefois*.

About the same time the poet's thoughts were frequently turned towards the drama. As early as 1849 he had had an inclination, or at least so he had said, to write vaudeville. But in 1854 the actor Tisserant, having heard him recite *le Vin de l'assassin* at some dinner asked him to expand this short poem into a five act play for the Odéon, its subject being "poverty, drunkenness, crime." Tisserant was talking at random but Baudelaire took the suggestion seriously. No doubt the possibility of a theatrical success had till then been absent from his collection of projects. Sooner or later, he was bound to add this well-known avenue to wealth to his other fantasies. So he wrote a vague scenario, which seems more like the sketch for a serial story than the plan of a dramatic work, and sent it to Tisserant. But even in the letter in which he informed his mother of the fact, he says: "One must not delude oneself, the play has still to be *written*." And it was he who underlined this word, with such forboding of toil, I imagine, with such dread!

The poet had now left the rue Pigalle, where he had been cooped up in a damp ground-floor room in noisy surroundings, and where, too, his creditors had begun to find him out; and in Februray 1854 Baudelaire fled to the hôtel d'York, 61 rue Saint-Anne. In May of the same year he was at the hôtel du Maroc, 35 rue de Seine.

Arondel, always close on his track, hunted him out there

one morning. But Baudelaire had seen him coming and just had time to slip into the dressing-room. The money-lender, accompanied by the landlord, came into the room, sat down and said he would wait. Baudelaire, close by, kept quiet. However, the hotel-keeper, who was an obliging man and knew that his lodger was hidden there, at last persuaded the ominous bird to take himself off. And the debtor, saved, watching the disappearing vulture through the dingy curtains, laughed bitterly.

In 1855, in March alone, the poet changed his address three times, " living where he could, sleeping among vermin, bandied from hotel to hotel."

In January 1856 he was living at 18 rue d'Angoulême du Temple. In July of the same year at the hôtel Voltaire, 19 Quai Voltaire. " When then," he wrote, " shall I ever have a valet, a cook and a home ? I am absolutely sick of this life of cheap restaurants and furnished lodgings, it wearies me to death and poisons me . . . I am sick of colds, headaches and feverishness, above all, of having to go out twice a day, [to get his meals] and that through snow, slush and rain."

In the various lodgings at which he stayed, the poet received two kinds of visitors in the mornings, his mother and Jeanne.

Since their return, the General and his wife had had a house in the rue du Cherche-Midi, where Madame Aupick used to have an at-home day. " Your cursed Monday," her son called it, laughing at her ; and he carefully avoided being present at these at-homes. So it was the old lady who had to put herself out. Now that Charles was no longer living with " that dreadful woman," his mother was able to visit him at his rooms. Often in his trouble Baudelaire would appeal to her who, in spite of everything, was the great love of his life. Undoubtedly, he still resorted to his mother's purse, but now it was not only

money that he begged for, but affection ; that his mother would come in to embrace him when she was passing. And she hastened to him at once.

How sad must have been her reflections as she sat by her unhappy child's unmade bed, in the untidy and almost squalid room at the hôtel du Maroc, this woman who only a little while before had been ambassadress at Madrid ! Sometimes at the sight of this destitution, her middle-class prejudices would lead her to make some clumsy remark, which would incur an answer like this : " As to your fears that, in poverty, I may become careless of my person, I must tell you that all my life, whether in rags or living decently, I have always set aside two hours for my toilet. Don't mess up your letters with absurdities of that sort." Maria Clemm would never have said such things, but poor Caroline could never hope to be in the right.

As to Jeanne, it was in the early morning whilst her lover was still in bed, that she made her visits. How aged and worn she looked in the misty morning sunlight ! She would sink into a chair and groan. There was no doubt that she was ill, and unhappy. At the sight of such decay Baudelaire's eyes filled with tears. He remembered, too, that he had twice " sold his old mistress's jewellery and furniture," that she had got into debt on his behalf, signed bills for him, and that one terrible night he had almost beaten her to death. How could he not be moved to pity ? Did he not hide from Ancelle the condition to which the wretched woman was reduced, because he thought the lawyer would be only too glad to hear of it ? However, the negress would beg a little money from him, the sole object, indeed, of her visit, and her lover would rummage through his drawers and give her the little he might have. Then she would pick up her old bonnet and go off, about the time when the water-cress seller was beginning to cry his wares along the street.

Outside there was fog and rain and the gurgling of a choked water-spout. Another day which promised to be heavy with boredom, even from the morning, dizzy as the void, as the gulf of somnolence. The black cat, arching its slim back, rubbed itself against the bar of a chair, and leapt suddenly, soundlessly, on to the table and stood over the dried-up ink-well. All work was interrupted.

Yet the shower beating on the pane, the moan of the wind, the bell booming outside, the hissing of the log on the hearth and the ticking of the clock, these, though for the present they were not fixed as literary images in the strict framework of verse, but still floated in space, undifferentiated from the passing minute, still experience, in fact, these were the very elements from which Baudelaire's poetry was composed. All work, we said, was interrupted, but was not this the instant when in the brain of the exhausted man a mysterious, unseen work began, like that of a bee-hive, unsuspected by the poet himself ? I mean that slow elaboration by which the raw reality is transformed and refined into the material of art, and finding at last its tone and its rhythm in words, gives out that original, unheard-of, heart-rending note, which was later to waken so many echoes in our minds. No doubt Baudelaire, in those days of stupor, did not write a single line, he would not have had the physical strength. That may be, but it was then, more than ever, that he was steeping himself in the atmosphere of his own poetry, in his " cold shadows," and his " ends of autumn " and his " mud-soaked springtimes."

Indeed, one of the essential characteristics of this poetry is that of fog-sodden boredom, fog and boredom intermingled, the fog of cities ; in a word, the spleen. When boredom, as with Baudelaire, is synonymous with spleen, it has nothing in common with that temporary lack of diversion, that momentary weariness, which we associate

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with the word *boredom* as it is generally used. It is still further removed from the romantic melancholy of a René, which is an exalted melancholy, almost an invocation to the emotion of sorrow : " Come hither, longed-for storms ! " No, Baudelaire's boredom is an infinite emotion, it is a boredom so absolute and endless that, to use his own expression, it :

" Assumes the magnitude of immortality." [1]

Apart from the morbid antecedents that we are acquainted with, a psychiatrist would perhaps see in this acute distress a case of recurrent neurasthenia. As a matter of fact, from 1847 onwards, when he was only 26, he frequently complained in his letters of fits of depression that destroyed his will. Now, at that date, it is impossible to attribute such a state to the beginning of general paralysis. The virus which was later to cause the general paralysis he died of, was undoubtedly already in his veins in 1847, but, as far as I know, general paralysis does not develop subterraneously for twenty years or more before the first appearance of its symptoms. If, then, we are at all costs to find a pathological explanation for the poet's nervous debility, other factors must, we believe, be reckoned with besides the venereal disease from which he suffered : that is to say, the fact that he was the child of an old man, and his excesses, the abuse of alcohol and drugs, etc. ; not to mention the terrible insomnia due to his incessant financial worries, or the peculiar fatigue due to the labour of versification, which, in a careful artist, anxious for perfection, may amount to a kind of obsession.

Whatever may have been the nature and origin of this nervous exhaustion, it is noticeable that there was a certain time of year which terrified Baudelaire every time it came round : the autumn, for it was then particularly that

[1] Prend les proportions de l'immortalité.

the spleen overwhelmed him. Yet, just as some chronic invalids come, not only to endure their illness with patience, but even to cherish it, so it sometimes happened that the poet, after cursing the rainy season, would find in it a bitter sweetness : he found a terrible pleasure in it, like a foretaste of the grave.

For death, the idea of death, is another of his obsessions as he lies there without moving, stretched fully dressed on the bed, in his room already filled with twilight ! The gleam of a gas-lamp outside in the street, coming in through the streaming window-pane, vaguely lights up the darkening room. He dreams. . . . Behind the high walls of the houses, towards Montmartre and Ménilmontant and Montparnasse, he imagines the town's cemeteries at nightfall ; those three other cities within this greater city, smaller in appearance than the cities of the living, but how much vaster in reality, how much more populous, with their closely packed dwellings heaped one above the other. And even in places that are to-day thronged with people, like the *Square des Innocents*, he conjures up the ancient charnel-houses that have been pulled down or have disappeared, swallowed in the waters of time with all their dead, like ships that have gone down with their crews. And presently he begins to tremble, at first an imperceptible shudder, less of the body than the mind, but which presently reaches his knees and slowly spreads over his whole body. For he has lost the faith of his childhood, or believes that he has lost it ; the thought of death is not for him an abstract speculation, a metaphysical or theological preoccupation with the future, but a terrible fear of the last ravages that our wretched shell must undergo, when the breath of life has left it for ever. In other words, death does not appear to him as a higher region where the soul is set free, but as a continuation, perhaps an aggravation, of our present slavery. It is the supreme, incurable

sickness. And who knows that the body, or what remains of it, does not retain a horrible impression of this ultimate affliction, and even in the tomb continue to suffer from the cruelness of the weather :

" The dead, the poor dead, suffer great pains." [1]

He dreams of Mariette, " the warm-hearted servant " who had died when he was ten years old, and suddenly he sees her watching him, " huddled in a corner of the room," and weeping. But it is only a gleam from the street-lamp, its flame shaken by a sudden gust of wind. The landlord's step sounds in the passage as he shuffles along in his slippers. There is a knock at the door : " Are you there, M. Baudelaire ? " There is no reply, letters are slipped under the door and lie there for days unnoticed. Then at the shock of some fresh vexation the period of inertia gives place to a frenzied outburst. " I am not sure that anger gives talent," the poet writes, " but, if it does, I ought to have a great deal, for I never work save between a distraint and a quarrel, a quarrel and a distraint."

When he had first suffered from these alternating crises of discouragement and fury, the unhappy man had sought distraction in transitory love-affairs. The *Carnet amoureux*, in which he carefully made a note of " good addresses," testifies to the frequency and the diversity of his curiosity, if not of his desires. But soon these brief intoxications, like those of opium and haschish, left him with nothing but a weariness of the whole body, a weight pressing upon the base of the skull—not to speak of the disgust : for it must not be forgotten that, at this time, debauch was a serious matter. It had lost the care free note of witty gallantry that it had had in the eighteenth century and had not yet become, even amongst the most cynical, that sort

[1] " Les morts, les pauvres morts, ont de grands douleurs."

of feather-brained, indifferent acquiescence that it is to-day. In Baudelaire's time debauch was clandestine. If it was shame-faced, it was because it was accompanied by remorse. It was a last resource for the hopeless, a way of forgetting, a cowardly kind of suicide.

On the other hand, how could Baudelaire have found the slightest happiness in sensual pleasures ? In his private note-book, he compares a lover's embrace to a torture, a surgical operation. According to him, in the grip of passion the human face expresses nothing but a mad ferocity. And as to the moment of satisfaction, when the lovers grapple in a kind of death, he refuses the name of ecstacy to this sort of decomposition.

So much for the physical side, but even in its moral aspect (and, in the passions, morality permeates the physical, colours, and often arouses the world of sensation), the real pleasure, he says, " lies in the certainty of doing evil." It may be seen that there is something of the theologian in this depraved sensualist, but a theologian who has made a pact with the devil, a priest possessed with evil. For him, love is synonymous with fornication, with lust : the physical act is a Black Mass.

It is by this bias, the bias of sacrilege, that Baudelaire's sadism is connected with the conception of christianity. No soul could be more divided than this idealist's, sunk in material things, wallowing in them, or rather writhing with his eyes turned to heaven. Baudelaire is, if I may say so, the very type of the sinner. It is his conception of sin, solely, that makes him appear at first sight religious. He suffers from violating the Law, but he has to violate it if he is to remember that it exists.

Later, towards the end of his life, though he never became what is called a practising Catholic, the poet acquired the habit of prayer ; but for years he never prayed, he only knew God indirectly, through the suffering that follows sin,

through repentance and the horrible joy of blasphemy. Only slowly, through a thousand misfortunes, did Baudelaire reach the point of adoration. When he attained this peak, his work was written and he had but a short time to live. This is why there is an absence of all repose in his work ; no dew of benediction, but ashes of sadness. What is triumphant in *Les Fleurs du Mal* is, precisely, Evil ; every page is an evocation of this time of trials and mistakes. And further, in this book sin fills so great a place, that sometimes it seems to be no longer the disobeying of the commandments, but obedience to another commandment. This is what has been called Baudelaire's satanism. If *Les Fleurs du Mal* was not the testimony of a difficult ascent, if we considered it not as a journey but as the destination, it would in truth be an evangel of Manicheism.

In this duality of Good and Evil, in the constant struggle between the two principles, lies not only the basis of Baudelaire's poetry, but the whole of Baudelaire himself. His is a double nature, eager for debauch, but thirsting, at the same time, for a pure and immaculate love, greedy for soothing words and the caresses *of a mother*.

Here we find most certainly ineffaceable traces of the great passion of his childhood. To begin with, this passion had an influence on certain tendencies of his sensuality. Indeed what else was it that unconsciously he sought to rediscover in the perfumes that enslaved him, but the intoxicating smell of the muff in which, as a child of seven, he had loved to bury his face ? And when Jeanne, still young and beautiful, used to undress for him, why did he always ask her not to take off her jewels, if it was not that the tinkling of necklaces and earings stirred in him the memory of faraway ecstacies ?

But from his earliest childhood, it was a desire for tenderness, for a pure tenderness, that above all filled his heart. There were numerous women from whom he sought,

without always admitting it, the satisfaction of this need. Some of them are still enigmas to us, as for instance J. G. F., the unknown woman to whom he dedicated the poem called *Héautontimorouménos*, and later, *Les Paradis artificiels*. But we know that the M. D. to whom the magnificent *Chant d'automne* is dedicated, was an actress from the Gaîté, Marie Daubrun, whom for years Baudelaire surrounded with attentions.

Marie Daubrun was pretty and sweet-tempered. And also, as often happens in the theatrical world, she was brave and honest. She kept her family by her own work. The poet often used to go to visit her in her dressing-room, in the evening, and took an interest in her concerns and her little ambitions, and admired the way this daughter, after playing her five stupid acts, as he said, had the courage to go and look after her parents who were ill.

One might think that Baudelaire would have appeared almost out of place in this part of the good, loyal friend. But it is none the less true that he played it, and played it well, seriously and with delicacy. And all this was so innocent that he could speak about it quite freely to his mother. On Marie's birth-day, as he wanted to give her, if not a present, at least some flowers, and having no money, he quite openly borrowed from Madame Aupick, who was always easily moved.

On another occasion he intrigued with the object of getting the manager of the Porte-Saint-Martin to give his protégée an engagement at this theatre ; later he tried to interest George Sand and Ponson du Terrail in her behalf. Lastly, he was for some time on bad terms with Banville when he also paid attentions to this charming child.

But there was still another Marie, an artist's model who, after a conversation with Baudelaire, determined not to pose any more, we do not know why. This woman, however, was in love with another man, as she confided to

Baudelaire, who only loved her the more for it. She was for him, he said, an object of religious devotion, it would have been impossible for him to profane her. It was a virtuous emotion that bound him to her, a chaste and tender affection, like a Christian's love for his God.

To give an earthly name to such a mysterious and incorporeal devotion would be a sacrilege. "You will be henceforward," he wrote to her, "my talisman, my strength. . . . Through you, Marie, I shall be strong and great. Like Petrarch I will immortalize my Laura. Be my Guardian Angel, my Muse and my Madonna, and lead me along the path of the Beautiful."

Here are declarations which, indeed, if not very passionate, are filled at least with a keen spiritual exaltation. But what may surprise us is the fact that at exactly the same time, the poet was writing in exactly the same terms to another woman, Mme. Sabatier, so that it may be asked whether Mme. Marie and Mme. Sabatier were not one and the same person. What seems at first sight to strengthen this hypothesis, is the fact that she had sat for the sculptor Clésinger, for his *Femme piquée par un serpent*. None the less, this identification must be rejected. Mme. Sabatier's name was Aglaé and she liked to be called Apollonie. A poem in *Emaux et Camées* was addressed to her under this name:

"J'aime ton nom d'Apollonie,
Echo grec du sacré vallon,
Qui, dans sa robuste harmonie,
Te baptise sœur d'Apollon." [1]

What can we conclude then, except that there must have been in Baudelaire's feelings a certain constant emotion, which corresponded to an unchangeable ideal, but could adapt itself to different and, as it were, interchangeable objects.

[1] I love thy name of Appollonia,
Grecian echo of the sacred valley,
Which in its robust harmony
Declares thee sister of Apollo.

Madame Sabatier was of the same age as Baudelaire. She was a merry widow, famous in the world of art and letters for her beauty, her go and her independance. According to Judith Gautier she was rather tall, with delicate joints, charming hands, and very silky golden chestnut hair, a bright and clear complexion, regular features with something roguish and witty about them, and a small and laughing mouth. But the Goncourts, who were never remarkable for their good nature, described her's as a coarse disposition with a certain trival, shallow, vulgar gaiety, a fine woman but rather common, "one of Pan's rout." The lines of her figure were in fact luxuriant, as is proved not only by Ricard's portrait of her, *La Femme au chien* and a bust by Clésinger that is in the Louvre, but also by that famous *Femme piquée par un serpent*, by Clésinger too (which has been stranded in the Georges Petit Gallery, or at least was there a few years ago), a plump nude bending down in twisted attitude.

As to the lady's temperament, one is led to believe that she was, as the Goncourts said, rather free and easy, by the fact that this gay companion was by no means offended at receiving homage from the literary men of her circle in the shape of pieces of pure pornography.

To her friends she was known as *la Présidente*, there are certain *Lettres à la Présidente* among the private works of the amiable Gautier which, though rather laboriously erotic, suffice to enlighten us as to the tastes, the humour and the diversions of the charming Aglaé. This, however, is the idol to whom Baudelaire, with the shyness of a schoolboy and the trepidation of a mystic, was for several years to devote an idealistic worship.

Madame Sabatier entertained every Sunday evening, at dinner, writers and artists who were not among the least important of their time, Gautier, Alfred de Musset, Sainte-

Beuve, Flaubert (who was known in the group by the nickname of *le Sire de Vaufrilard*), Ernest Feydeau (author of *Fanny*, who hated Baudelaire), Maxime du Camp, Louis Bouilhet (whom they called " Monseigneur " because he was so stout, it seems), Henry Monnier, the sculptors Clésinger and Préault, and others ; and later on, the Goncourts, who, in their *Journal*, so efficiently disposed of the hostess.

It was in 1852 that Baudelaire was first invited to the rue Frochot. In his *Journaux intimes* he is far from kind to women in general : " Woman is the opposite of the Dandy, so she should be horrifying. When a woman is hungry, she must eat ; thirsty, she must drink, etc. . . . What a character ! Woman is *natural*, that is to say, abominable."

Champfleury relates that Baudelaire obliged his friends' mistresses to take wine and tobacco in order to quieten their tongues and it must be confessed that the women he had been accustomed to meet till now in Bohemian circles cannot have been of the highest grade, nor Jeanne's woman-friends either. He hated the chattering girls at the cafés who were for ever breaking in on discussions of aesthetic interest.

Nor was he any fonder of the conversation of those middle-class women who were supposed to be agreeable. He sometimes visited, in the evenings, his friend Paul de Molènes, who had recently been married, and about nine o'clock he would say : " Send your charming wife to bed, conversation is impossible with these pleasant little creatures."

On the other hand, in his *Journaux intimes*, the poet notes down very didactically : " The manners which are charming and which constitute beauty are, the sophisticated manner, the bored manner, the thoughtless, the cheeky, the cold, the introspective, the dominating, the

wilful, the spiteful, the ailing, and the cat-like, which is a blend of the childish, nonchalant and spiteful."

Now Madame Sabatier's manner was not any of these. She was gay. She was, even, "She who is too gay."[1] Further she was fat, and Baudelaire liked thin women, because thinness he said, is more indecent, more naked. It is true that it is a question of incorporeal love, at the moment. But here is the fact, at any rate: almost as soon as he was invited to *la Présidente's* salon, Baudelaire fell in love with this "Rubens," or at least began to crystallise around her buxom form the most ethereal reveries.

Throughout five years, from 1852-57, Baudelaire was sending Mme. Sabatier anonymous notes and poems, which he begged her not to show to anyone. He was so fearful of offending her that he disguised his handwriting. He hoped for nothing. No love, he said, had ever been more disinterested, more imbued with respect. She whom he loved was for him not merely the most attractive of women, but the most precious of superstitions. He even went so far as to forbid himself to feel any jealousy towards the "fortunate lover, the Possessor." Having met him by chance, he declared himself delighted to find him an amiable man, worthy to please her. The poems devoted to the idol are all, except one, which is a sadistic vision, hymns of joy and light. Mme. Sabatier, like Mme. Marie, was the poet's Laura, his Muse, his Good Angel, his Beatrice,

"Nothing can equal the sweetness of obeying her."[2]

But yet, still in this same period of his life (1856), the poet had quarrels with Jeanne which, for the first time in a relationship of fourteen years, ended in a serious breach, and, although they had been living in separate lodgings

[1] Cf. the poem "A celle qui est trop gaie."

[2] "Rien ne vaut la douceur de son authorité."

for some years, this break, strange as it may seem, was a terrible agony to the poet. It was no longer a question, now, of ideal loves or of literature.

" This woman was my only distraction, my only pleasure, my only companion, and, in spite of all the internal clashes of a stormy relationship, the idea of an irreparable separation never clearly entered my mind. Even now, I still find myself thinking, at the sight of some beautiful object, a fine landscape, anything that is pleasing : Why is she not here to admire this with me, to buy this with me." Thus Baudelaire confessed himself to his mother, in a kind of frenzy.

Following this crisis, he remained for ten days without sleep, exhausted from continual sickness (no doubt due to excess of laudanum, which he took in heavy doses to numb his grief) and obliged, he said, to hide himself because he could not stop crying, try as he might.

This was deep, sharp suffering, a suffering which was involved with the worship not of the Angel but of the Fiend. But this does not mean that Baudelaire was in any way insincere in his role of bashful lover : perhaps the cries of frustrated flesh must always surpass in violence the aspirations of the soul. Baudelaire has written in one place : " The woman one does not possess is the woman one loves." But elsewhere he wrote : " Monstrous emotions of affection or of admiration for a vicious woman . . . what horror and what delight in loving a woman-spy or thief. . . ."

In the state that he was in, weak, care-worn, self-divided, to be deprived of spiritual ecstacies caused him suffering. But when he came to be cut off from his vices it was a more serious matter ; then he was wild with pain.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Date in Literature

" I have put my whole self into this terrible book."
(*Baudelaire, in a letter to Ancelle, February 18th, 1866.*)

In 1850, when Léo Lespès (Timothée Trimm), the editor of the *Magasin des familles*, published two poems by Baudelaire in his review, *le Vin des honnêtes gens* and *le Châtiment de l'orgueil*, he judged it prudent to introduce them with the following note : " These two poems are taken from a volume entitled *Les Limbes* which will be published shortly, and which is intended to reflect the restlessness and the melancholy of the younger generation."

In 1855 Buloz, the editor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, having consented to print eighteen unpublished poems from the volume still in preparation, preceded them with the following rather embarrassed excuses : " In publishing the poems you will read below, we believe that it will once again be shown how favourable the spirit that animates us is to experiments and tentatives in the most diverse directions. What appears to us to merit attention here, is the keen, and, even in its violence, enquiring, treatment of certain weaknesses, of certain moral anxieties which, without sharing them or disputing them, we should endeavour to recognize as one of the signs of our times. It seems to us, too, that this is one of those cases where publicity is not only an encouragement, but may have the effect of wise advice, and inspire the true talent to free itself, to strengthen itself, by extending its paths and expanding its horizon."

The poems which Baudelaire contributed to the *Revue des Deux Mondes* appeared under the title *Fleurs du Mal*, then printed for the first time, in the issue for June 1st. The volume, which had already been announced for nine

years, had been baptised in turn *Les Limbes* and *Les Lesbiennes*. It was Hippolyte Babou who, one evening at the café Lemblin, found the definitive title, *Les Fleurs du Mal*. The text is so rich in beautiful things, so full of power, that there is no reason to suppose that, without the title invented by Babou, the destiny of Baudelaire's poems would have been any different, but there is no doubt that the rather provocative violence of this title assisted their immediate success, by detonating the scandal.

On their publication in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, the attacks began. The signal was given by the *Figaro*, in an article printed November 4th 1855, under the signature of Louis Goudall, which contained phrases like these: "A heart-breaking poverty of ideas . . . a scrofulous, disgusting, frigid poetry . . . of the charnel and slaughter-house."

After this diatribe Michel Lévy was still hesitating, in 1856, to publish the promised volume, when fortunately a friend of the author's, Poulet-Malassis, took on the venture himself.

Auguste Poulet-Malassis was the son of an Alençon printer. He was educated at the *École des Chartes* and, like Baudelaire, had flung himself into the revolution of 1848. He was exiled after the June affair, then pardoned, and returned to Paris, where he was living when his father's death obliged him to go and take charge of the family printing works at Alençon. But this high-spirited young man was bored to death in his country-town. As the printing of the local newspaper and official notices for the district did not satisfy his energetic character, he had the idea of publishing, in the slack season, some of his favourite authors. Poulet-Malassis (Coco-Malperché, as Baudelaire had nicknamed him) had soul and taste; soul, though he was a materialist and an atheist; and taste, in which the good and bad were mixed, a taste not always quite trust-

worthy, but at the same time cultured and well-meaning. As a printer at any rate his attempt was meritorious. With the work of Perrin, at Lyons, and of the Hérriseys at Évreux, Malassis's endeavours mark the revival of the art of typography, which had been at a standstill in France since 1848. He liked good paper, fine types, titles in red, decorated initial-letters, fleurons and tail-pieces. So he deserves to be honoured! He began with an anonymous edition of Banville's *Odes funambulesques*. Then in six years from 1857-62, came among other works, Leconte de Lisle's *Poèmes barbares*, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, by Baudelaire, a re-edition of *Émaux et Camées* by Theophile Gautier, a re-edition of the *Poésies complètes* of Sainte-Beuve, *Améthystes*, by Banville, *La Vie de Balzac*, by Théophile Gautier and the *Paradis artificiels*, also by Baudelaire.

The printing of the *Fleurs du Mal* was begun in January 1857. In order that the text, finely produced, should itself be flawless, nothing was left to chance. But Malassis had a partner at Alençon, his brother-in-law, de Broise, who was exasperated by the author's continual requirements, and this made Baudelaire angry: "If you do not want extra expenses, Sir, you should not send me faulty proofs." With Malassis himself his reproaches were more friendly in tone, "Ah, you miserable impatient fellow, have you printed without waiting for my final corrections?"

At last, at the end of June 1857, *Les Fleurs du Mal* by Charles Baudelaire was published, the book written with "frenzy and patience," the fruit of more than fifteen years' work. It was dedicated in a solemn, lapidary style to Théophile Gautier.

Its success was immediately helped by an outcry from offended morality. The *Figaro*, once again, was loud in denunciation; in the *Ceci et cela* column, Gustave Bourdin, the son-in-law of the editor, Villemessant, wrote indignantly

that in these poems, " the odious rubs shoulders with the ignoble, repulsiveness stands side by side with impurity." In the *Constitutionnel*, Paulin Limayrac wrote in the same tone. But, according to Baudelaire, it was the article in the *Figaro* that definitely started the prosecution. Perhaps, even, Bourdin had written at the direct suggestion of the ministry. In vain the author's friends busied themselves, so far as they could, to avert the storm. Barbey d'Aurevilly's article for the *Pays*, Asselineau's for the *Revue Française*, were not printed.

" Uncle Beuve," though his intervention might have been of the greatest service to the poet, declined to say anything in the *Moniteur*. He was willing, in private, to call Baudelaire " my dear child," but this did not prevent him from deserting him, and that in the most mean and hypocritical way: that is to say that, even while beating a retreat, he wanted to give the appearance of being a faithful and active ally. On July 20th, he had written to the poet thanking him for sending him his " fine book." But when a professional critic sends a letter instead of an article, far from taking its place, it only emphasizes the sender's intention not to compromise himself. To explain his silence in the *Moniteur*, he made the sly excuse that an unfortunate precedent prevented him from doing anything. Some months before, the author of *Madame Bovary* having been brought before the courts and acquitted, the intrepid Sainte-Beuve, once judgment had been given, had dared to speak in praise of the book, and M. Billault, the Minister of the Interior, had been somewhat offended at this audacity. To do the same thing again might have been difficult. In the end it was Edouard Thierry who wrote, instead of " Uncle Beuve," a favourable article in the *Moniteur*.

Sainte-Beuve contented himself with privately sending his " dear child " a note headed, " A few points for your

defence as I envisage it." He indicated the arguments which, in his opinion, if they were taken up and developed by his counsel would lessen the effect of the inquiry and tend to soften the judgment of the bench. They amounted to this—the influential critic pleaded extenuating circumstances : " In the domain of poetry everything had been appropriated. Lamartine had taken *Heaven*. Victor Hugo, the *earth* and more than the earth. Laprade, the *forest*. Musset, *passion and dazzling orgy*. Others, the *fire-side*, *rural life*, etc. Théophile Gautier, *Spain* and its brilliant colours. What was left ? What Baudelaire had taken. He had been almost obliged . . . " Then he cleverly added that there were also in Béranger, refrains, in Musset, lines, which might be denounced as dangerous or offensive to decency. And yet Béranger was a " national poet, dear to everyone, whom the Emperor had thought worthy of a public funeral." Musset (who had died that year) was a " poet sovereignly to be regretted," and was also a member of the Academy. . . .

This was the little note, not only very stupid, but humble and timid, as if ashamed of the cause it was supposed to be defending. The only thing we can say in Sainte-Beuve's behalf is that it was not entirely a case of cowardice : of the profound originality of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, he understood positively nothing. This was made clear when, the time of danger having passed, he at last publicly pronounced judgment on Baudelaire's poems : " The author," he said, " went for his inspiration to the furthermost end of the literary Kamchatka." Then he compared the *Fleurs du Mal* to a " kiosk made of marquetry, of a studied and composite originality," and he called this the *Baudelaire Mania*.

It is true that he wrote to the poet later that his *Joseph Delorme*, his, Sainte-Beuve's, was *Les Fleurs du Mal* of yesterday. But there again he was mistaken, and, this

A note of comedy was added by Ancelle : " this plague " who had not been able to refrain from coming to the trial. In his madness for taking part in everything and everywhere making acquaintances, he went from group to group, asking questions, giving advice, forcing himself into conversation with the author's friends. The latter asked Baudelaire who this tall gentleman with white hair was. The poet, upset by his presence, worried by these signs of interest which seemed to him to be so many faults of taste, or indiscretions, terribly afraid that his advice would compromise him or make a fool of him, kept glancing at his trustee, throughout the proceedings, in dismay ; but the old man, mistaking the meaning of these glances, taking them for signs of sympathy and connivance, replied from the distance with winks and grimaces.

PART FOUR

Voilà que j'ai touché l'automne des idées.

CHAPTER ONE

Fame and Aftermath

. . . ma plaie
Et ma fatalité . . .

THE APPEARANCE of Baudelaire at this period has been made widely known by the steel-engraving in front of the Michel Lévy edition of 1868. He is clean-shaven, with short hair and dressed in a sort of artist's smock, very full and well-cut ; a loose cravat, tied with careless skill, under a wide shirt-collar only slightly starched and turned down, leaving the neck free—as the Goncourts, who were supping near the poet at the café Riche one evening in 1857, called it, " a real guillotine rig-out." But, if we are to believe the Goncourts, the poet was not wearing a cravat that evening ; a piece of slovenliness that seems surprising on his part. But there is no knowing how far their natural malice might mislead the Goncourts ! Baudelaire had small hands. That, for a start, was a defect. But to complete the crime, these hands were " washed, cared-for and clean, like a woman's." This revulsion of the two brothers from a pair of clean hands is extremely curious.

Emile de Molènes, who knew Baudelaire at this period, tells us that some people in fact did call him " le guillotiné " because of his open collars. Others nicknamed him the priest, because there was something ecclesiastical in his manner. So too, Catulle Mendès, who met the poet at the *Revue fantaisiste*, the Parnassian's first review, in the passage des Panoramas (then passage Mirès) called Baudelaire His Eminence Monseigneur Brummel.

It was at the *Revue fantaisiste* that Baudelaire became acquainted with Léon Cladel, whom towards the end of his life he treated rather as a disciple and for whose novel, *Les Martyrs ridicules*, he wrote a preface. The author of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, who used to be seen also at the *perron* of Tortoni or at the Divan in the rue Le Peletier, at this time enjoyed among the younger men the prestige of a persecuted author, of a " poète maudit." He called his young friends " les Éphèbes " or " les Éliacins." Sometimes he teased them, giving them advice in a fatherly tone, sometimes, in his rasping voice, jeered at them fiercely ; and everyone, when he consented to speak about art, listened open-mouthed.

The success of the *Fleurs du Mal* had not failed to direct *la Présidente's* keenly interested attention to Baudelaire. She, who had till then taken so little notice of him, now saw her unusual suitor in a fresh light. His anonymity, as one may imagine, had been seen through long before.

Mme. Sabatier had a little sister who, meeting Baudelaire one evening, burst out laughing in his face and said : " Are you still in love with my sister and do you still write her superb letters ? " The poet had then realised that his secret was the talk of the *salon* in the rue Frochot. But did he every really expect that the poems he sent with his notes would not have disclosed his identity at once ? And if they had not, would he not have been the first to be piqued ?

MADAME SABATIER
from the bust in the Louvre by CLÉSINGER

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So, the mystery being at an end, it was Aglaé who, boldly, took the initiative. As we have seen, she was fond of smut, and here was Baudelaire who had just been found guilty of an offence against public decency! What an attraction! Not to mention that the *Fleurs du Mal* would have suggested to the mind of this licentious woman certain extremely appetizing complications of sensuality, a whole casuistry of the flesh, in fact.

The trial had taken place on 20th August; on the 30th Madame Sabatier yielded. She yielded, but I suspect that the treasures she offered, those celebrated *objets noirs ou roses* were not accepted, that Baudelaire would not, could not accept them. In fact, I believe the affair was one of those that Stendhal would have included in his chapter on "Fiascos." The discomfiture was complete on both sides. Once things had gone so far the difficulty must have been to withdraw with politeness. The notes exchanged from 31st August onwards between the idol of the evening before and her faltering worshipper, show clearly this retreat by stages: as hurried as possible on the part of Baudelaire, whom one feels to be ready to give way to panic; slower on the part of the vexed beauty who still found it hard to believe that she positively had to retire before she had received homage.

The poet confessed that he was *lacking in faith*. Let us see what that means: "A few days ago," he wrote regretfully, "you were a goddess, which is so convenient, which is so beautiful and inviolable. And now, you are a woman." Others would have rejoiced in the transformation. On the other hand, when one has an exclusive and deep-rooted taste for lean, brown bodies (for a brown verging on black, even) how absurd to have put oneself into the position of having to pay honour, in other rhythms than those of verse, to a plump blonde! Or else, having made a "Madonna" of this pretty, pink and white, fleshy

woman for five years, he should have left her in her niche. Indeed, Baudelaire must have thought to himself: "Sacré-Saint-Ciboire!" (as he used to swear) "what am I doing in this galley?"

If we treat this matter flippantly it is because we find it impossible to consider this winding-up as anything but an embarrassment and a deception, both of which easily turn to the ridiculous. "My anger," wrote *la Présidente*, "was very justifiable. What can I suppose, when I see you avoid my caresses, except that you are thinking of that other, whose black face and soul come between us. So I feel humiliated and degraded. If it were not for my self-respect I should call you names." There is an explicit statement!

Fortunately, Madame Sabatier was what is sometimes called a "good sort"; she bore the poet no grudge for this ludicrous affair. For his part, though for some months at any rate he avoided being alone with her, which he "dreaded horribly," he still went the rue Frochot on Sundays. He made *la Présidente* little presents, one day an ink-stand, another a fan. Little by little they reached a stage of feeling which, equally removed from mystic ecstacy and sensual passions, corresponded this time to the truth: that of a sincere comradeship.

But in this same year, 1857, an event took place which had much more importance in Baudelaire's life than all this; three months before the publication of the *Fleurs du Mal* his step-father died.

"I am a faulty creature, I have sinned and I ask pardon of God and my fellow-men. Born in the most humble circumstances, Providence has permitted me to follow a brilliant career, which I have done without allowing myself to be dazzled . . ." That is how the will of the late Jacques Aupick opened. The fulsome solemnity of the *de cujus*

is there complete. A senator, once a general-officer and an ambassador, cannot withdraw from the world quite simply. So many honours, crosses, decorations, not to mention the "foreign orders," compelled their recipient to maintain a pompous attitude even in his death, and besides, the style of the period encouraged that sort of thing.

Such a document, although M. Aupick had the tact to omit his step-son's name altogether, explains many things simply by its tone. Not that it excuses Baudelaire's impertinences, but it makes us realise how completely impossible it was that there could have been any measure of understanding between the two men.

Let us continue, though, for it is worth while: "I commend to the solicitude of my friends my beloved wife whom for thirty years I have found constantly at my side, affectionate and devoted, and who has done so much to make easier for me the discharge of my high functions, particularly abroad, where the grace of her mind united with the graciousness of her manners, gave her receptions a charm that everyone was delighted to acknowledge. I devote my last thought to her, and seek shelter in the bosom of my Creator."

A good mark for Caroline! We have never doubted that she was a model wife, and her grief must have been sincere, but a certain anxiety about the future was mingled with it. For the general had had no private fortune and had saved nothing, having always entered the whole of his emoluments under the heading, "costs of keeping up my establishment." His widow, now having an income of only five thousand francs, had suddenly to exchange a grand style of life for a very modest one.

She prudently decided to retire to Honfleur, where her husband, a few years before, had built a small summer residence on the cliffs. The sale of some of the furniture, and of the horses, carriages and harness, which Baudelaire

attended to with the help of Valère, his step-father's major-domo, brought in about thirty thousand francs.

Fortunately, too, the pension for which Madame Aupick applied to the government was granted her by the Emperor, and began in June. It amounted to six thousand francs a year, which was more than might have been hoped.

Once again, even in a time of mourning, Caroline's affairs turned out well.

For the poet, his step-father's death had been, as he said, " a solemn event, like a call to order." Up till then there had been a shadow of excuse for his harshness to his " poor mother." He could, in fact, consider that someone other than himself was taking care of her. Now it was no longer so. The first idea that struck him on the general's death was, that henceforward he was the sole person responsible for his mother's happiness. Everything that he had till then permitted himself, carelessness, egoism, rudeness, violence (it is Baudelaire who accuses himself) was henceforward prohibited. And in fact, from this time forward the tone of the relations between son and mother is softened and more tender. This is not in reality an innovation, but rather a passionate return to what had once been, or even a simple abandonment to those feelings that had never actually ceased to exist, but had merely been concealed by circumstances for many years.

Yet, whatever Baudelaire may have said, the anxiety of his new responsibilities was not the sole reason for his change of attitude. There were two others, if not better at least more deeply seated : the first was, that age and trouble had taken the edge off his character ; the second, that he had now no motive for jealousy—his mother, as in the past, belonged exclusively to him. And this was so true that his imagination, with a kind of painful satisfaction, returned to the memory of that distant past, to the little house at Neuilly, and further back still, to

the time of the walks in the Luxembourg, to the image of his father.

In those days he often asked his mother questions about this father he had known so little of, as if the twenty-nine years of M. Aupick's reign had been blotted out and counted for nothing. One day, in the passage des Panoramas, the poet discovered a water-colour portrait of François Baudelaire, by which he was very affected. "All this old stuff," he said, "has a moral value." His own portrait by Deroy, which had followed him through all his many moves, was now definitely given away to a friend, for he no longer cared for these "daubs." But above his writing-table now hung the portrait of the old man with the ebony eyebrows.

Some of the friends of the deceased general, amongst others a certain M. Émon who often used to go to Honfleur, tried to upset this renewed intimacy between mother and son. Under the influence of this man, Mme. Aupick reproached her son for his "wicked book." She meant the *Fleurs du Mal*. But the poet complained, more gently perhaps than he would have done earlier, and M. Émon was dismissed.

Later, there was the Honfleur parish priest, the Abbé Cardinne, who, having himself asked Baudelaire for a copy of the *Fleurs du Mal*, burnt the book in his own fireplace. As the poet said, "That sort of thing is no longer done except by madmen who enjoy seeing paper blaze." But Caroline was very pious, she was alarmed by the priest's action. She was not, however, insensitive to the small pleasures of notoriety. "From the moment that Charles published something," she wrote to Ancelle, "my tone, and perhaps even, unknown to myself, my opinion, changed."

So now Mme. Aupick was living on the cliffs in her "doll's-house." She had a garden with a superb view.

Baudelaire went to Honfleur to see his mother, and hoped to stay for long times at a stretch.

In the meantime, he used to send her little presents from Paris, for her birthday and her name-day ; a lace ruffle or a drawing by Guys. He also sent her some Peckaou-Souchong tea and a few books : Michelet's *l'Amour*, " an immense success, a success amongst women " ; *Fanny*, by Ernest Feydeau, " an immense success, a repulsive, a super-repulsive book " ; and *La Légende des siècles*, " a fine book, this man Hugo is indefatigable."

On the other hand, having tried in vain to make some money with an Indian shawl that Mme. Aupick had let him have, he writes to ask her if, by chance, she has something else of no use to her, but worth selling, that he could raise some money on.

As a matter of fact, the success of the *Fleurs du Mal* had scarcely improved the poet's material position. In 1857, he published in the *Présent*, six *Poèmes nocturnes* (his earliest prose poems ; two had already appeared in 1855 in a little book entitled *Fontainebleau*), and in the *Artiste*, a fine study of Flaubert. In September 1858, the *Revue Contemporaine* published *De l'idéal artificiel* (the first part of the *Paradis artificiels*).

But Baudelaire's poetry was not marketable. Indeed its value was so debated, that Alphonse de Calonne, editor of the *Revue Contemporaine*, thought himself in a position to alter certain lines that he considered to be weak. As a result the author, quite understandably, was furious : there was an exchange of abuse, and soon the situation grew so strained that for a moment the poet thought of challenging the editor to a duel.

In the same way Baudelaire's criticism, masterly though it was,—Buloz, incidentally, had called him a bad critic,—could not be any more remunerative, since it was above most people's heads. So the poet returned to his schemes

for the stage. He now spoke of *l'Ivrogne* as if he had begun to write the play, and even said that the first two acts were finished, but he was lying. It was no longer Tisserant who was to act his play, but Rouvière the famous interpreter of Othello and Hamlet, to whom Baudelaire had devoted a flattering article in the *Nouvelle galérie des artistes dramatiques vivants*, in 1855. The poet also entered into relations with Hostein, the manager of the Gaîté. He hoped, or pretended to hope, that Hostein would give him a considerable advance as soon as he saw the scenario.

But instead of beginning to write *l'Ivrogne*, he was already considering another play, that he thought of taking from a story by Paul de Molènes : *le Marquis du Ier houzards*, and a third drama, *la Fin de Don Juan*. Don Juan's servant was no longer to be Sganarelle, but " a kind of Franklin mind," that is to say, " a rascal like Franklin." Don Juan would meet the shade of Catiline ; the great seducer face to face with the great conspirator. . . . But all this was a mirage !

As the poet could not go frequently to Honfleur, but was kept in Paris by his plans and by the necessity of interviewing editors of the reviews and papers and theatre managers, solitude again began to weigh on him terribly. It had been proved, by now, that Madame Sabatier, that coarse, cheery blonde, was by no means the person to fill the horrible emptiness of his life. No more was the extraordinary Madame Niéri, a friend of *la Présidente's*, a foreigner who, when she went out with Baudelaire, took upon herself to pay for the cabs, a gesture which the poet, somewhat humiliated, called a " child's trick." He wrote a sonnet for this amazon, in which he calls her Sisina and compares her to Diana ; but since his rendezvous with the opulent Aglaé, in the rue Jean-Jacques-Rousseau, he was distrustful of his too literary enthusiasms, and stood on the defensive.

Who was there then ? Jeanne, good heavens ! Jeanne, who was old, ugly, ill, stupid, spiteful, thieving, perverted, brutalized by drink, but who, after all, was still Jeanne ! In 1854, Baudelaire had said : " I must at all costs have a home. I shall go and live with a woman again. If by January 9th I am not living with Mlle. Lemer, I shall be with *the other*." The other ? Doubtless, the mysterious J. G. F.

In the meantime he had had enough of the hotel on the Quai Voltaire. He left it in December 1858 and betook himself with his furniture and his old black mistress, to number 22 in the narrow rue Beautreillis, not far from the Bastille. Soon, however, he was again disgusted with this living together, and fled to Honfleur, leaving Jeanne alone in her new lodgings.

But neither at Honfleur was life very amusing, although the poet had a view of the sea from his room, which he was very fond of. What he missed was conversation, the life of the cafés and, sometimes, opium. When his supply of opium came to an end and he had no money to send for more, he grew depressed and irritable. Yet, save for a short visit to Paris, he stayed there for six months, all the first part of 1859.

In March, Jeanne had a slight stroke. The poet immediately hurried to see her ; he sent the sick woman, one of whose arms was paralysed, to the Dubois nursing-home. Then from Honfleur, whence he returned, he used to send the fees for Mlle. Lemer to the hospital authorities. But Jeanne soon sent for more money, saying that unless it was paid she ran the risk of being sent away. Poulet-Malassis, on behalf of Baudelaire, went to the hospital to ask for an explanation. He discovered that Jeanne had hoped to make her lover pay twice, in order that she might appropriate the second payment to herself. Nor was this all ; at the end of three weeks the negress was disgusted

with the hospital routine, that is to say, she was furious at being deprived of alcohol, just as Baudelaire, at Honfleur, suffered from being deprived of opium. So one morning, taking matters into her own hands, she left the nursing-home, bought a bottle of rum on the way, and hurriedly returned to the rue Beautreillis to get drunk.

When at the beginning of the summer of 1859, Baudelaire was recalled to Paris on business, he avoided meeting Jeanne and took a room at the hôtel de Dieppe, in the rue d'Amsterdam. Once again he was alone.

CHAPTER TWO

Angels Dispute with Devils

O douleur ! ô douleur ! le temps mange la vie ! . . .

In 1859 Baudelaire wrote another *Salon*, which came out in the *Revue Française ;* but it was not complete, for this little review died before the end of the study had been inserted. The same year *L'Artiste* published a study of Théophile Gautier. Besides these, some new *Fleurs du Mal* appeared in 1859 and 1860, in the *Revue Française*, the *Revue Contemporaine*, the *Causerie* and the *Artiste*, and these poems, in beauty and perfection of form, are in no way inferior to the earlier ones. In January 1860, the *Revue Contemporaine* published *les Enchantements et tortures d'un fumeur d'opium*, and Poulet-Malassis issued in the same year, a complete edition of the *Paradis artificiels.*

All this represents a respectable amount of work, especially when it is remembered that the translation of Poe continued all the time. The poet, indeed, without entirely dismissing the chimeras in which his imagination still sought a means of freeing himself at one stroke, spent less and less of his time in idling. His own success incited him to a more regular effort, as did also the certainty that he now had a faithful and devoted publisher, who, in addition, was continually spurring him on.

Nevertheless, in 1860, a momentary disagreement between author and publisher interfered for some weeks with the publication of the *Paradis artificiels.* The subject of the discussion may appear remarkable for those times. Poulet-Malassis wanted to print at the end of the volume the advertisement of a Brussels chemist, describing certain preparations of haschish. This publicity was to

be paid for by the subscription of 200 copies. It was impossible to make "Coco-Malperché," who in this showed himself to be a bold precursor of publicity methods, realise how reprehensible, and even dangerous, such a proceeding was. There was reason for the poet to wonder anxiously if the imperial police would tolerate such cynicism. The recent judgment against him for "immorality" would have appeared in another light, had there been a repetition of the offence, this time tainted with considerations of money. Fortunately, after a very lively exchange of letters, the scheme was abandoned, though this did not prevent the Ministry of the Interior from refusing to license the book.

So Baudelaire worked, and his health had become so uncertain that at that time it was in itself an attainment to do any work at all. He was the martyr of his own excesses and was encumbered with such heavy liabilities, not merely of debts but of physiological defects, that at the very moment the desire came to him to lead a better regulated life, to work more diligently, the will was unfortunately not sufficient, the body often refused to obey.

Had the poet a doctor? It hardly seems so. I cannot remember that in all his correspondence there is once mention of a doctor, except in Belgium at the approach of the final crisis. No doubt, up till the last moment Baudelaire feared that a doctor would have ordered him, as a first essential, to give up all stimulants, and as he could not bring himself to submit to that, he preferred to treat himself according to information gleaned here and there from his friends.

In his letters and private papers he speaks of cold showers, potassium iodide, and a syrup of Iceland lichen that he prepared himself and of which he gives the prescription. One reads there, too, that he took opium to cure his colic. But was it not precisely to the habitual

use of opium taken in the form of laudanum, that this colic was due ? So that instead of palliating the evil, he probably aggravated it. In the same way, he tried to overcome his spasms of choking by means of ether capsules, but the remedy soon became another bad habit and in its turn produced serious disorders.

For a long time the poet had complained of vomiting, and now he suffered, besides, from continual sleeplessness, and when at dawn, under the influence of narcotics, he dozed off, he had nightmares, breathlessness and palpitations, and would wake up with a start, in great pain and in a cold sweat. Lastly, the old complaint which had reappeared at Dijon some ten years ago, now gave further signs of its virulence in the form of a rash, headaches and extreme lassitude.

But now he received a more serious warning : on January 13th, 1860, whilst he was out in the town, Baudelaire had a slight congestion of the brain. He was able, however, to give an address to a cabman, the address of an old woman (Jeanne's mother perhaps, for Jeanne had a mother, or perhaps the *other's* mother or again perhaps, the mother of one of those women-friends whose names are recorded in his *Carnet amoureux*). This old witch treated him with peculiar remedies. After a few moments he was able to get up, but he was hardly on his feet when he had a fresh attack, with sickness and giddiness ; he was unable to mount a stair without feeling that he was going to faint. Finally, a few hours later, it had all cleared off, and next evening he was able to return to the hôtel de Dieppe feeling perfectly well, but, he said, " as worn out as if he had been a long journey."

Nothing, though, not even illness or worries, could diminish that faculty Baudelaire had always had, of enthusiasm or indignation, in short of taking sides vigorously in all

important artistic quarrels. The same man who from 1845 had defended with so much passion and intelligence Delacroix's still-disputed genius, now saluted in the person of Richard Wagner, who had arrived in Paris in the autumn of 1859, the reviver of modern music.

Baudelaire was present at those famous Pasdeloup concerts on January 25th, February 1st and 8th, 1860, which had been for many who were soon to become the champions of Wagnerian music in France, an overwhelming revelation. The poet was enraptured. "This music," he wrote to Poulet-Malassis on February 16th, "has been one of the great joys of my life; it is quite fifteen years since I have been so carried away." Fifteen years, that is to say, since 1845, the very year when he had first encountered the work of Delacroix.

Baudelaire immediately joined up with the small group of early supporters like Léon Leroy and the Gaspérinis. Champfleury, his old friend of the *Corsaire-Satan*, was not slow in joining him. A little while later, the poet met the musician himself, at Tortoni's, where Wagner sometimes used to go, followed by his dog Fips. No doubt, too, Baudelaire was one of the guests at the Wednesdays in the rue Newton, where Berlioz and Gounod used to go too, and where Minna, Wagner's first wife, used to receive the guests standing at her husband's side.

About the same time, too, the poet became friends with the artist Constantin Guys. By his style, which was at once incisive and suggestive, by his preoccupation with characteristic idiosyncracies, with actuality seized in the raw, this historian of the manners of his time could not fail to delight an artist who had himself taken such pains to render, both in prose and verse, all that was corrupt, complex, artificial and incongruous in what is called modernity.

The sepia-drawings of Constantin Guys do indeed seem like actual illustrations of Baudelaire's Paris, with its

mingled throngs: dandies in trousers with footstraps, with long skirted coats pinched in at the waist, a "blunderbuss" pulled down over their ears, a monocle screwed in the eye; flabby prostitutes in gaping peignoirs, lounging in some select establishment, on low seats, divans, sofas, poufs; fashionable courtesans reclining in their victorias, or standing about in the paddock shielding their faces under little bell-shaped parasols; young misses with the tiniest hoods fastened with very broad strings; society women at the opera with bare, sloping shoulders, their wasp-waists springing out from the silken balloons of their crinolines; and, in the gutter by theatre exits, their hands outstretched for alms, under the spurts of mud from the departing carriages, those who once at Frascati's or the Tivoli, had played the parts of Eponina or Laïs, the "little old women" in poke bonnets.

It was about the same time, too, in the years 1859-60, that Baudelaire interested himself in the fate of Méryon the etcher, who was then living in poverty. But even in Baudelaire's kindness there was something of anger; "This Méryon does not know how to manage things; he knows nothing about life. He does not know how to sell his work or to find a publisher. His work is very saleable."

Unfortunately, Méryon's unhappy case was still further aggravated by a persecution mania. In order to help him, Baudelaire suggested that he should get Poulet-Malassis to publish an album containing twelve etchings of views of Paris, and that he, Baudelaire, should add to each plate a short poem or sonnet. Méryon repulsed the idea with a sort of horror.

Baudelaire then suggested adding poetic reflections, in prose, to the etchings; Méryon again refused, as what he wanted was a literal description of his drawings, a text in the style of a guide book or manual.

It might be imagined that Baudelaire, being so proud

and so irascible and harrassed himself by so many troubles, would have sent the man about his business, but no, he submitted to his demands on the single condition that he should not sign the descriptions. Besides that, he claimed no part of the money from the sales and did not cease to call his friend and publisher's attention to " this unfortunate madman who does not know how to manage his own affairs and who has produced a fine work." " I have had in mind for you," he wrote to Poulet-Malassis, " the double pleasure of a business opportunity and a good action." That is a sentiment, it seems to me, that M. Ancelle would have remembered and inserted in one of his municipal sermons, happy to find that there was still such a thing as morality.

Baudelaire's generosity did not end there. With what brotherly zeal he added, " And whilst we are on the subject, think of Daumier, of Daumier without any commissions turned off *Charivari* in the middle of the month, having only been paid for half a month." The fact is that Méryon and Daumier were artists, true but unrecognized artists, and that was a sacred matter.

At the same time, it happened that in the course of his life Baudelaire did commit certain dishonourable actions. This biography is truthful, its sole object is to show the man complete, under all his aspects, with his greatness and his faults. Among the latter are those we could wish to have been of a different nature. When it is a question of money, there is something sordid in the most harmless irregularity. It is a stain on the person's life, which greater crimes, perhaps, would sully less.

Now in August 1860 Baudelaire allowed himself to part with a sum of money which had been entrusted to him. Creditors, and among them Arondel, perhaps, that old tiger, hemmed him in on all sides and so, to quieten them, he handed

over part of the money that had been left with him. As he was owed money by various papers, he thought that he would be re-embursed to the amount he had appropriated before it would be claimed.

But his calculations turned out to be wrong. Then he confessed his dishonesty to his mother and begged her to rescue him, and what seems to me no less serious than the offence itself, is the sentence that he adds : " There is no necessity to exaggerate what I have done, it is monstrous as a piece of stupidity, but *I have done it several times without any harm.*" That is not all ; nine months later, in May 1861, he did the same thing again.

Without seeking excuses for behaviour for which there can be none, one may at least try to explain it. And how ? By poverty ? no, that is the plea of a defending counsel, the pathetic argument, and it is too easy ; but by the very mentality of the guilty man, who has preserved all his life, through all his difficulties, the state of mind of the young man of property and family. Such a man, in fact, always retains at the bottom of his mind the conviction, that, if the worst happens, he will be rescued, that is to say that his family will not let him be prosecuted, but will buy off the creditor at the first threat.

So Baudelaire still believes at forty. " My mother," he said somewhere, " is fantastic." Fantastically indulgent, certainly, and inexhaustible in forgivness, like so many mothers. Did he not sign bills payable at Honfleur, which fell like meteorites in the mornings on the little doll's house on the cliffs ! Mme. Aupick said, " Charles, although you are good hearted, I fear you will ruin me." But having said that, she paid, as Charles knew she would. He imposed on her, it was his way of loving. He adored egotistically.

And here is a fresh proof of it, of such enormity that it may appear exaggerated ; Mme. Aupick had complained

that her sight was failing. "Get advice," her son said to her, "get plenty of advice. Remember that I shall be living with you one day and that the sight of a blind mother, whilst increasing my responsibilities, though that would be nothing, would be a daily agony for me."

And this further confession, which reveals the complicated depths of his nature, a disconcerting blend of scrupulousness and perversity: "Your candour," he wrote to his mother, "the ease with which you are duped, your simplicity and your soft-heartedness, make me laugh. Do you think, then, that if I wanted to, I could not ruin you and bring you to poverty in your old age? But I *restrain myself*, and at each fresh crisis I think: No, my mother is old and poor; she must be left in peace."

But he was also capable of great devotion, for his heart was, in fact, good. It must have been for his mother to say so, who had suffered so much by him in so many ways. As Jeanne's health did not improve ("my paralytic," he called her at this time), and how could it improve when she always had a bottle of rum by her bedside, Baudelaire rented rooms for his old mistress at 4 rue Louis-Philippe, Neuilly. This was in December 1860. As Neuilly was then still in the country, these rooms were more airy and pleasant than those Jeanne had been living in in the rue Beautreillis. Baudelaire himself left the hôtel de Dieppe to go and live with the wretched memory of his old love.

But a surprise awaited him on his arrival. He found in Jeanne's company a mulatto, who, having turned up without warning from the ends of the earth, from San-Domingo perhaps, had found nothing more to his liking than to settle down at his sister's and live at her expense without doing any work. The arrival of Monsieur Charles, still the recognised protector of Mlle. Lemer, in no way disconcerted the half-breed. Sitting astride on a chair, with his arms crossed over the back of it, he still went on

placidly smoking his pipe in the invalid's room, from time to time spitting from a distance into the fire-place. This disturbing person would arrive at eight in the morning, have his meals served by his sister's bedside, and stay until eleven o'clock in the evening, so that it was impossible for Monsieur Charles to have a moment's conversation alone with his friend. The white man was deliberately kept at a distance and was looked on as a negligible quantity by the coloured couple.

Perhaps Jeanne found that her brother was all the same rather too unceremonious, but she knew that he was hot-tempered, quick to curse and to fight, and she did not dare say anything. Baudelaire too, was violent-tempered, but like all those who are not robust, always at the mercy of his nerves: that is, faced by coarse, determined people, he soon lost confidence. As he did not feel equal to having the matter out with the parasite, he took advantage of a short absence of his to complain to Jeanne. He did not claim, he said, to have any right to drive her brother away, but if he continued in his lack of respect he would go back to Honfleur. He did not at all mean that he was going to withdraw his support from Jeanne, but since she was now living with this brother, he thought it right that the latter should for the future share half or two-thirds of her expenses.

The unfortunate woman did not disagree but she began to weep. It was clear that her brother terrorized her, and that the mere idea of having to convey such remonstrances to him made her tremble. None the less she promised, sobbing, that she would suggest to this formidable individual that he should go back to his business (what that business was, no one dare ask); but she did not hide the fact that she was very much afraid her request would be taken badly, for in all the years he had been away he had never sent any money to their mother.

Next morning, in fact, when his sister risked opening the

subject to him, the mulatto cut her short : " Your lover," he said, " must be used to difficulties. When one takes up with a woman it means that one makes oneself responsible for her support. As for me, I have saved no money at all. Don't count on me for anything." Having said that, he knocked out the ash of his pipe against his boot, called the servant and ordered his breakfast.

Baudelaire maintained later that if this reply had been made to him personally he would have " slashed the man's face with his cane." But that was how he took his revenge in imagination. In reality, he himself gave way and went back to the hôtel de Dieppe.

Some little time later, Jeanne's condition having grown worse, she had to be moved to hospital again. When she came out and returned to Neuilly the lodgings were empty ; in her absence her brother had sold the furniture.

CHAPTER THREE

On the Brink of Suicide . . . and a Candidate for the Academy

J'ai peur du sommeil comme on a peur d'un grand trou . . .

" O MY dear mother, is there still time for us to be happy ? I no longer dare to believe it ; forty years old, and still in the hands of a trustee, with enormous debts, and lastly, worst of all, my will lost, spoilt. And perhaps, who knows, my mind itself affected ? I know nothing about it, I can no longer know anything, for I have lost the power to make any effort even.

" Above all there is one thing I want to tell you, that I do not often tell you, and that you are doubtless unaware of, particularly if you judge me by appearances, which is that my fondness for you goes on increasing all the time. It is shameful to have to admit that this affection no longer even gives me the strength to pull myself together. I think of the years that have gone by, those horrible years, and spend my time reflecting upon the shortness of life, nothing else, and my will gets rustier and rustier. If ever a man knew what it was to have spleen and hypochondria when he was young, it was certainly I. And yet I have the desire to live, and should like to know something of security and fame, to be contented with myself. Some terrible thing says to me : *never*, and yet something else says : *try*.

" Of so many plans and projects, accumulated in two or three files that I no longer dare to open, which shall I carry out ? Not one, perhaps . . ."

This letter was written in March or February 1861, the poet himself was no longer sure of the date. It had lain amongst his papers a long time before he had the courage to send it. The second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*,

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE
from a drawing made by himself about 1860
(Reproduced from *Les Dessins de Baudelaire*, published by
La Nouvelle Revue Française)

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containing thirty-five new poems, had just been published by Poulet-Malassis but the author's copies remained lying on his table for a month, before he had the energy to send them off.

He was in a state of nervous terror of some kind. The idea of suicide, which he had already many a time played with, returned persistently. "At all hours of the day," he says, "this idea tortured me. I saw in it a complete deliverance, deliverance from everything." At the same time, by a strange contradiction (but only apparent according to him) he prayed all the time. To whom? To what definite Being? He did not know.

Nevertheless he prayed that two things might be granted him: for himself, the strength to live; for his mother, a long, long life. And in his distress, memories of his childhood crowded upon him, he invoked the intercession of Mariette, the "warm-hearted servant" of old times, and of his father, whose portrait, "always dumb," watched him fixedly. To these two, memories of whom were bound up with those of his earliest childhood, he joined in a fervent appeal the soul of the spiritual brother he had found after so long and then by chance, of the man who had been his only fellow upon earth, his double, Edgar Allen Poe.

Yet on March 13th, 1861, Baudelaire went to the Opera to see *Tannhäuser* performed. As is well known, it was disgracefully hissed. Catulle Mendès, then aged twenty, who was amongst the few faithful who took part in the battle, in his book *Richard Wagner* remarks upon the poet's disdainful attitude amidst the excitement of the pit. But what Mendès could not have known was, that the indignation that filled Baudelaire's soul throughout this stormy evening, was to save him from suicide by distracting him from his fixed idea. In fact the article on Wagner, that appeared on March 18th in the *Revue Européenne*, was written in three days in a printing-works.

where the poet worked at it from ten in the morning to ten at night. This violent occupation, he said, drove away his obsession.

But having accomplished this task, he fell into a fearful despondency, accompanied with hallucinations. At the moment of dropping asleep, and even in his sleep, he distinctly heard voices, whole sentences, commonplace and trivial, which had no connection with his usual thoughts and ordinary preoccupations.

The effects of all these sufferings were felt profoundly by his mother; every letter from her son was a fresh occasion for tears. Although he had treated her so badly, her heart was torn by his complaints. Perhaps she would even have preferred his former injustices and insolence to these cries of a discouraged man, like the moaning of a child.

Sacrificing herself in advance to her unhappy son, she expressed her intention of selling the "doll's-house" and coming to live with Charles in Paris, and at the same time she asked that he might be freed of his trustee and that she might join her income to his. But this plan, which was Baudelaire's suggestion, met with obstinate opposition from Ancelle. The trustee, indeed, knew his ward. He also knew Mme. Aupick's weakness. Did she not also talk of dismissing her servant so that, thanks to this economy, she would be able to send more money to her son? In truth, she would have given her last penny for him.

But Ancelle watched over her. He liked to temporize; he was one of those old chatter-boxes who easily make use of their chatter to delay things. Baudelaire knew what he was like; his rage had so often been broken by that evasive eloquence, by those interminable digressions, by that art of drowning a request in a flood of talk. So the lawyer behaved in his usual way; he was talkative, busy,

preoccupied ; and was in turn dilatory, elusive and wearisome.

Similarly when Mme. Aupick seemed disposed to transfer to her son a sum of 10,000 francs, half of which was to be used in paying off old debts, Ancelle pretended not to understand and, without asking for further enlightenment, escaped and was not to be found.

It was, however, at the end of this year 1861, one of the saddest in his life, that Baudelaire made a move that surprised everyone : he stood for the Academy. Such an action proves of itself how completely chimerical his ideas were in all worldly matters. But even in 1857, the very year of his trial, he had hoped that the imperial government, the government that had prosecuted him, would make him Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. And again the following year, at the time of the August investiture, when Mürger was given the red ribbon and Sandeau the rosette of Officer, the poet, though he had simulated a disdainful indifference, had seemed a little astonished at not seeing his name in the *Moniteur*.

In standing for the Academy, Baudelaire made the same mistake as many other writers, who seem to forget that the illustrious company is not simply an assembly of men of letters, but first and foremost an *institution*.

Now Baudelaire certainly had genius, but was he highly thought of in what are called academic circles ? By no means. He was looked upon by them as a kind of bohemian, whose scandalous poems had been publicly stigmatised. He had not, therefore, the least chance of being elected, or even of being taken seriously as a candidate.

The truth is, the poet considered the matter entirely from his own point of view, without the slightest regard for external reality, that is to say, his inner conviction of his own value concealed from him the absurdity of his

intention. Certainly he may have told his mother that the only thing that interested him in the matter, was the small emoluments that went with the appointment, though he did not know the exact amount (it is laughable, he was referring to the attendance vouchers); certainly he also wrote that he did not care about the approval of all " those old fools " but that he thought his mother attached the greatest importance to public honours, and that, if by a miracle he succeeded, it would be a great pleasure to her; and he may also, even, have made the astounding reflection that, if he had the good fortune to be elected, he would easily get control of his property again, for could one imagine an academician with a trustee?

But in reality, as that eminent student of Baudelaire, M. Jacques Crépet, has pointed out (and his long study of the poet gives him the highest authority), in reality, he canvassed the votes of the Academy from a personal need for rehabilitation. For, however improbable it may seem to-day, the prosecution of the *Fleurs du Mal* had, at the same time that it had made the poet's name known to the public, brought a certain discredit upon him. In the *Débats*, for instance, M. de Sacy would not allow any allusion to be made to a writer whose book had been condemned by a court of justice.

Thus Baudelaire thought that once he could cross the threshold of the Academy, the suspicion that surrounded him would immediately cease. Obviously: but he was reasoning in a vicious circle, for it was this very suspicion that precluded any chance of his success.

In another direction, as was to be expected, in the clubs, amongst the smaller reviews and in the literary cafés, the announcement that the author of the *Fleurs du Mal* was to contest Scribe's seat in the Academy, was met with indignation and amusement. Baudelaire was abused and mocked as a turn-coat who was going over to the official

camp from the side of the independents. To Flaubert, who from the depths of his retirement at Croisset, had disapproved of this wild scheme, Baudelaire replied : " How is it that you have not guessed that ' Baudelaire ' means Auguste Barbier, Théophile Gautier, Banville, Flaubert, Leconte de Lisle, that is to say, *pure literature ?* "

The long and the short of it was, that in December the poet began to pay the necessary calls, on foot, as he says, and " in rags." But we must not take this last word too literally, for Baudelaire was always careful, even particular, about his appearance. It was not till two or three years later that he was sometimes to be seen in worn-out clothes ; and even to the last, when he was poverty-stricken, he insisted upon the luxury of white and immaculate linen.

Several of the academicians avoided him. It was impossible for the poet to meet Ponsard, to whom Asselineau had given him a letter of introduction, or Legouvé or de Sacy, or Saint-Marc Girardin, or even Prosper Mérimée, with whom he was acquainted.

Villemain, the permanent secretary, received him haughtily. " *I* have never had any originality, Sir," he is supposed to have said to the candidate. To which the latter is supposed to have replied, not without malice : " But, Sir, how can you be sure ? " From Viennet the poet brought back this definition of poetry, since become famous : " In poetry, Sir, there are only five kinds : tragedy, comedy, epic poetry, satire and occasional verse, which includes the fable, in which I excel." But is all this quite authentic ?

Henri Patin, the Latin scholar, behaved charmingly. So did Sandeau, to whom the poet had been introduced by Flaubert. There is, however, no little irony (doubtless unintentional) in this remark of Sandeau's to the poet : " There is just a chance, just a chance, that you might

get a few votes out of the Protestants for Lacordaire's chair."

Baudelaire had, in fact, had the strange idea of giving up his candidature for Scribe's chair and he was canvassing for Lacordaire's. For this decision, which was at least unexpected, he gave the following reason : " Lacordaire was a romantic priest and I love him." But even to those who were most kindly disposed towards the poet (I mean to him personally, for no one took his candidature into account) this reason, far from appearing a valid one, only seemed to be a fresh eccentricity.

Sainte-Beuve, spiritually confused but an extraordinarily clear intelligence, was for the moment stupefied : how could a man of such obviously superior gifts as Baudelaire, still, at the age of forty, have such mad ideas ? To the cunning old critic, with his respect for authority and the hierarchy, so skilled in the art of gauging influences, such a misunderstanding of social relations, of their rules and working and management, remained incomprehensible.

Indeed, there is only one explanation of all this ingenuousness : which is that Baudelaire knew only one corner of society, Bohemia. The son of bourgeois parents, he had, in early youth, broken with society. A dandy he was, but not a drawing-room dandy like Musset, rather a dandy of cafés and restaurants, of studios and casinos and places of ill-fame.

At first " Uncle Beuve " had wanted, of course without compromising himself, to give his " dear child," so annoyingly embarked upon this academy escapade, a proof of his affectionate interest. It was then that, in a kind of scrutiny of the various candidates that came out in the *Constitutionnel* on January 20th 1862, he had devoted to Baudelaire the famous paragraph where he speaks of the Kiosk and the Kamchatka. But now, here was this candidate whom he had publicly honoured with a dis-

cussion of his claims, making a terrible blunder by selecting, he, the author of the *Fleurs du Mal*, the chair of Lacordaire! He must immediately persuade this lunatic to send a letter to the permanent secretary, altering his decision: "Leave," Sainte-Beuve wrote to Baudelaire on February 9th, "leave the Academy as it is, more surprised than shocked, and do not shock it more by returning to the charge on the subject of a man like the late Lacordaire." Such a tone, on the part of the *womanish* Sainte-Beuve, was threatening, and this did not escape the poet, who retired from the struggle without insisting further.

It was then that, to avenge himself, usually the first instinct with him, he considered writing an article on *The Mind and Style of M. Villemain*, that "soulless mandrake," the outline of which was found amongst his papers after his death. This sketch was even so developed that one wonders what could have restrained Baudelaire from finishing it, with a view to publication. It would only have been a matter of an hour's work. Was it, perhaps, that he was considering the future?

In the end it was the Prince de Broglie who succeeded to Lacordaire's chair. Thus everything was as it should be.

A few pleasant memories, at least, remained to the poet of his academic adventure. I do not mean his visit to Lamartine, though the latter, out of respect for Mme. Aupick, received him very graciously. Baudelaire thought it was not worth trusting to the fine speeches of the singer of Elvire, whom he considered a "bit of a whore, a bit prostituted," though a perfect man of the world. No, it was Alfred de Vigny alone who treated Baudelaire as an equal—he alone, with his marvellous intuition, having seized upon the exceptional value of this pure poet, at once deserving and unhappy, like some Chatterton precociously grown old, already gray about the temples.

The two men talked for three hours on end, Vigny having

given orders that he was not at home so that they should not be disturbed. So much kindness on the part of the old, sick poet, living shut up in his rooms, so much flattering curiosity, so much understanding of the subtlest niceties of the spirit, made this one of those privileged meetings, so rare in an artist's life. Baudelaire was profoundly moved by this welcome. He soon went again to the rue des Ecuries-d'Artois, where Vigny once more kept him for three hours ; and as Vigny suffered from pains in the stomach, he recommended certain meat-jellies mixed with Madeira, and gave him the addresses of public-houses where they sold good English beer.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Irremediable

Le jour décroît, la nuit augmente, souviens-toi !

In 1861, in the intervals of respite that were left him between his ideas of suicide, his academic ambition and his money troubles, Baudelaire published a series of nine articles on certain contemporary poets in the *Revue fantaisiste*. Most of these essays, of which a very laudatory one was devoted to Victor Hugo, were soon afterwards reprinted in the *Anthologie des poètes français* published under the editorship of Eugène Crépet. The *Revue fantaisiste* published besides, in September, a profound article by Baudelaire on Delacroix's mural paintings in the church of Saint-Sulpice ; and on 20th April 1862, a review by him of *Les Misérables* appeared in *Le Boulevard*.

We know that Baudelaire did not like Hugo and that he only admired the master's work under constraint, as it were, (we have seen this in the case of the *Légende des Siècles*), but he owed Hugo certain obligations. Although he felt the most profound antipathy for the great poet's personality, he had begged him to write a preface for his study of Gautier, and even, with the intention of forcing his hand, had dedicated some poems to him (*le Cygne*, *les Sept Vieillards* and *les Petites Vieilles*). Hugo only returned a short answer, but it was one in which, in two words, he characterised the originality of Baudelaire's contribution to poetry. Hugo did not talk about Kamchatka or a kiosk, he said, " You create a new shudder."

So, in writing his flattering notice in 1861, just as in praising *Les Misérables* the following year, Baudelaire was paying off a debt of gratitude. " I have shown in this case," he said, " that I am proficient in the art of lying." Indeed,

he wrote elsewhere, that *Les Misérables* was "a filthy, clumsy book." But this judgment, which was expressed in a private letter, has the outrageousness of a mere sally.

One is too often inclined to see the exact reflection of a writer's thought in opinions extracted from his private correspondence. But even when he is absolutely sincere, as Baudelaire was in his letters to his mother, it may happen that the writer, just because he feels that he is free from any restraint, gives way to an extravagance of language due to changes of mood which have nothing whatever to do with their apparent subject, that is to say, are without any relation to the words actually written. So Baudelaire, for instance, may have been served with a summons a quarter of an hour before he began writing, and said "filthy and clumsy" when he meant to say . . . I don't know what, but something less savage, closer to his true feeling. And it is in this way that what is called sincerity may sometimes be exaggeration or falsity.

In the spring of 1862 Claude Baudelaire, the magistrate, the poet's half brother, died of congestion of the brain at Fontainebleau where he had spent all his life as a magistrate in the district court. Before this, in 1860, at the age of fifty-five, Claude had had a first attack from which he had never properly recovered.

The two brothers had been on bad terms for a long time. Charles could not bear anyone to talk to him about Claude, who had angered him in a number of ways. His crime, he said, is what is called "stupidity, nothing else, but that is a lot. I prefer bad people, who know what they are doing, to these *honest fools*." However, on Claude's death, Charles wrote to his sister-in-law, and in answering his condolences she invited him to go and see her.

Baudelaire made the journey with Ancelle. At this time the lawyer was still for the poet, "the horrible plague of my life." He called him "this imbecile" and jeered at

him because he was " always slow of understanding " and because " he still loved his wife and daughter without being ashamed of it." Besides that, he " knew as much about literature as elephants do about dancing the bolero. He is an insupportable man, the very type of the hare-brained, dawdling fool." One day this unstylish bourgeois tried to persuade Baudelaire to buy his clothes ready-made for the sake of economy. How incredibly mean ! On another occasion, when the solicitor had come to visit Baudelaire, he asked the landlord indiscreet questions. " Does Monsieur Baudelaire have women to see him . . . ? Does he come in late . . . ? " etc. The poet was furious when he was told about this tittle-tattling. In the space of an afternoon he sent his mother five letters one after the other, in which he vents his indignation : " Ancelle is a wretch and I am going to box his ears in front of his wife and children. I am going to box his ears at four o'clock (it is half past two now), I swear that this will lead to something, to something terrible." But what it did lead to, as always, was to the reconciliation of the two men.

So there they both were, the guardian and his ward, shut up, crammed together, face to face in the Fontainebleau train. It was a terrible day. " I would have preferred anything," said the poet, " rather than seeing him and listening to him for hours whilst he drawled stupidly : ' You have a very good mother, haven't you ? Do you love your mother very much ? ' Or else, ' Do you believe in God ? There is a God, is there not ? ' Or again, ' Louis Philippe was a great king, justice will be done him one day, don't you think ? ' " Baudelaire, obliged to reply to all these platitudes, thought that he would have a nervous attack.

Nor were the relations between the poet and his publisher always agreeable either, but when Poulet-

Malassis made himself obnoxious it was in a different way. He had, Baudelaire said, a mysterious faculty which inclined him to insult his friends, and to do so all the more brazenly the older and more intimate they were. In this connection Malassis used to remind the poet of a tradesman he had once patronised, a gilder, with whom he had been on good terms. One day Baudelaire rebuked him for his lack of manners, to which he made this superb retort : " Why should I worry about manners, since you are my friend ? "

" Coco-Malperché's " irritability had, all the same, some excuse. His affairs were going badly, for this good printer was a bad business man. It was in vain that he had opened a bookshop in the rue Richelieu whilst still keeping on his printing works at Alençon, for from 1859 onwards he complained that his literary publications did not make a halfpenny profit, and were often even sold off at a loss.

1859 was the year of the Italian campaign. Malassis, whose versatile mind registered, in Baudelaire's phrase, every change of temperature, thought of nothing but political pamphlets. So the poet very sensibly reminded him that it was human nature always to spend five francs on a novel or a stall at the theatre. " And," he added, " my *Fleurs du Mal* will go on and my critical articles will sell, less quickly perhaps than in better times, but they will sell. Even if the war shifted from Italy to the Rhine, people would still want to read novels and literary argument." This point of view was verified by the last war, and to-day all publishers would agree that it is true.

But Poulet-Malassis had advanced considerable sums to Baudelaire and the collapse of his business was soon to aggravate the poet's difficulties in a most tragic way. During the years of struggle 1859-62, Baudelaire did all that he could to hearten his publisher : " If I can get down to Alençon " he wrote, " I will do so at once,

not only to make a change for myself, but to shake you up."

At the same time he blamed him for neglecting his health. Poor "Coco," indeed, suffered from the very complaint which Baudelaire at different times and after an apparent cure, had found to be still troubling him. Now, in 1859, for the first time, "Coco" was imprisoned in the Clichy on the petition of one of his creditors. Since he was obliged to serve his term in the prison hospital, what could have been more sensible that that he should take the opportunity to get treatment? But no, although he had ulceration of the mouth and painful swellings in the throat which prevented him from swallowing without great difficulty, he persisted in quibbling about the real character of his complaint. Yet he had familiarly shown the first symptoms to Baudelaire. Baudelaire had seen for himself, and there was no possible doubt in the matter. "Coco" could not have forgotten this. So let him do as he, Baudelaire, had done, submit to a regular treatment; mercury, potassium iodine, and sarsaparilla! Sarsaparilla! it is scarcely believable! One might as well claim to cure a gastric ulcer with camomile tea.

By 1861 the publisher's bankruptcy had become inevitable, and he and the poet discussed, in friendly terms, what value the copy-right of such works as *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *Les Paradis artificiels* might have for the firm of Poulet-Malassis and de Broise.

"Coco" was not at all certain that they were worth 5,000 francs altogether. The poet was up in arms: that might be true, he said, at the moment, but it might not be so later on. Who knew whether *Les Fleurs du Mal* alone, sold outright, might not suffice one day to liberate their author! Unfortunately Malassis was in no position to consider even the immediate future, for the present hemmed him in on all sides. In May 1862 the firm was declared

insolvent ; in November the business was sold to Princebourde, who had been employed in the bookselling section. " Coco " was again imprisoned for debt, this time in the Madelonnettes prison, and his enemies even spread the rumour that he was at Mazas among the thieves.

In his disaster the publisher was compelled to pass on to his own creditors some of the bills signed by the poet. This liability being suddenly added to his arrears, Baudelaire's position became so bad that he could no longer hope to be able to meet his engagements.

He strove at least to meet some bill that had fallen due by giving *la Presse* the whole series of the *Petits poèmes en prose*. But the editor of that review, Arsène Houssaye, got wind of the fact that some of these pieces had appeared in the *Revue fantaisiste*. Some ill-disposed person had given him the information, and a quarrel ensued, a demand for an explanation and a breaking-off of relations. Baudelaire had been paid in advance for fifteen contributions : the publication was immediately stopped. At the *Revue des Deux Mondes* he received another check ; Buloz refused the masterly essay the poet had just written on Constantin Guys : *le Peintre de la vie moderne*. Baudelaire retorted with an angry letter, so that he was now embroiled in that quarter too. However, the *Figaro* accepted the article on Guys (26-28th November, and 3rd December 1863). But, whilst inserting it, the editor thought proper to preface it with a note which has the air of an excuse and is almost an insult. The author of it was, once again, the son-in-law of Villemessant, the same Bourdin who had reviled *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1857. Lastly, on the death of Eugène Delacroix, the poet published *Delacroix, sa vie et son Œuvre*, in *l'Opinion nationale* ; an essay which was a splendid homage to the genius of the dead master. But it was not with the proceeds from these short masterpieces that Baude-

laire could fill up the gulf which now was gaping under his feet. Yet he was ready to undertake any labour, and even consented to write a poem to order, imitated, according to him, from Longfellow (but in our opinion from Leconte de Lisle), for an American musician, a certain Stoepel, who, however, finally vanished without handing over the payment agreed on. And he even, pressed by necessity, sold all his rights in the five volumes of his translation for the ridiculous sum of 2,000 francs.

As for his dramatic attempts, there had now been no talk of them for a long time. *La Fin de Don Juan*, which was at first to have been a play, later became an idea for an opera and, in its last metamorphosis, a scenario for a ballet. It had been, for a period of several months, a pretext for meetings and discussions with Nestor Roqueplan, the head of the Imperial Academy of Music. But as no less a person than the composer was lacking for the realisation of the scheme, the whole thing was given up.

Merciless reality got the better of him, it may be said, and in the end cured Baudelaire of his mania for impossible dreams. But we cannot agree with this, a man can only think with his own mind, act according to his own character. It is impossible for him to alter it. But the horror of the present situation lies in the fact that insanity began to threaten this powerful mind.

" To-day, the 23rd January, 1863," Baudelaire wrote in his notebook, " I have experienced a singular warning ; I have felt the wind from the wings of idiocy pass over me." And yet in December of the same year he was speaking of a " *gigantic* scheme." Is not the word gigantic as terrifying as a madman's grimace here ? How can one doubt that in the poet's mind there persisted an infinite power of illusion, when one knows that he envisaged the possibility of being appointed manager of a great state-aided theatre ! When one thinks of the conditions of hardship to which he

was then reduced, of his physical and moral suffering, how can one read without a pang this sentence in a letter to his mother, in which under the stimulation of hope he sees his position completely reversed: "With regard to the Theatre, in a month, in six weeks, I shall have all my information, I shall have verified the amount of support, and in three years, in a year, perhaps, have slipped through your trusteeship (even if it means admitting it to the minister himself) like a clown through a paper hoop."

Yet, in the summer of 1863, Baudelaire enjoyed a moment's pleasure; it came to him, as sometimes happens in a literary career, through an article in a foreign paper. The paper was the *Spectator*, the writer, a poet—Swinburne. Immediately, the poet sent this testimony to his mother, so that Mme. Aupick might realise that her son was an important figure; for, indeed, she too often forgot this (in the poet's life-time did she even suspect as much?). It was excellent that she should admire Edgar Poe, but now that she spoke of no one but him she exaggerated: her son's works, too, had their value. "Ah," Baudelaire exclaimed, "How very true it is that relatives, parents, mothers, are not at all good at the art of flattery!" To see Charles thus jealous of the interest he had taken such pains to arouse in his mother for "Dear Eddie" would make one smile, if the sufferings of the poet for the rest of his life did not prevent one from feeling any other emotion than that of pity.

Yes, this salutation of the author of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, from Swinburne, away in London, was already the homage that he expected from the future; yet at this very moment, and in Paris, unhappily, the present was triumphant and stupidity reigned, "bull-headed stupidity."

In 1863 the *Figaro* published some extracts from a violent attack on Baudelaire by Pontmartin. In 1864 the same paper condescended to publish a series of *Poèmes en*

prose. Only, after two issues (7th and 14th February), Villemessant put an end to this whim, and the reason that, without any useless circumlocution, he gave the author for the step he had taken was, " Your poems bore everybody."

From then on, rebuffed everywhere, seeking in vain, since Malassis's collapse, a new publisher, Baudelaire " buried himself obstinately," as he said, " in his incorrigibility." He conceived the idea of writing his confessions. In this book, the title of which he borrowed from Poe, *My Heart Laid Bare*, and announced in advance, he was going to vent all his hatreds. It was to be a work of malice, for now he had need of vengeance, as a tired man has need of a bath.

The time had now come when Baudelaire had long greying hair and, his throat muffled in a violet scarf, a fat note-book under his arm, might have been seen wandering like a shade in company with old Guys, at Musard's, at the casino in the rue Cadet, or at Valentino's. To Monselet, who, meeting him one evening in one of these low dancing halls, asked him, " What are you doing here ? " he answered : " I am watching death's-heads go by."

It was perhaps in these pleasure-haunts, to the sound of Métra's waltzes, that the poet met that Berthe with the " dark eyes, deep and vast," who, towards the end of his life, he called his child, for he hardly saw Jeanne any longer except to slip into her hand the little money he might have in his pocket.

He continued to live alone, still at the hôtel de Dieppe, rue d'Amsterdam. At this time, he used to suffer from horrible stomach pains after meals, and in the evenings the hideousness of his small, dimly lighted room, overwhelmed him with misery. He suffered from the lack of *friendship* and of *luxury*. Sometimes, when the weather was fine, he would go, as Jean-Jacques, old and persecuted, had once done, for solitary walks in the outskirts of Paris. He

visited the Trianon once again, where he had been with his mother in the summer of 1851, for the terrible pleasure of treading once more in the footsteps of those far-off days.

For his misanthropy increased more and more, with his contempt for the present. The Paris breed, in these years 1862-4, seemed to him degenerate. It was no longer the charming and delightful society he had once known; the artists were completely ignorant, even of spelling. Excepting d'Aurevilly, Sainte-Beuve and Flaubert, he could no longer find common ground with anyone. Gautier was the only person who could understand him when he talked about painting. He was disgusted with life and had only one desire, to avoid human faces and, above all, the faces of French people. For France detested poetry, true poetry, and only cared for "sluts like Béranger and Musset." On the one side, smut, on the other, *sentiment*, *heart*, "and other feminine muck." Leconte de Lisle had been quite right when he said, "All the elegiac poets are riff-raff."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Last Flight

Le cœur gros de rancune et de désirs amers.

In the spring of 1864 Baudelaire escaped from his hell. He set out for Brussels, urged by the dazzling prospects that his friend Stevens rather off-handedly held out to him, with the intention of giving a series of lectures to the Arts Circle. He thought that, as a result, all the societies in the country would dispute the honour of hearing him and that he would make a profitable tour of the principal towns : Antwerp, Ghent, Liège, Namur, Bruges, etc. The poet reached Brussels on April 16th, and went to the hôtel du Grand-Miroir. He had chosen Eugène Delacroix for the subject of his first lecture, which took place on May 2nd, on the first floor of the Gothic palace opposite the Town Hall. It was a fiasco ; scarcely anyone came to hear him.

As Camille Lemonnier says, in the peculiar jargon that was fashionable about thirty-five years ago : " One should remember the total indifference of Brussels to literature at that time : people lived in a saturnine atmosphere where the Idea grew leaden-hued." The editor responsible for the Fine Arts column in the *Indépendence belge*, Frédérix, gave a favourable account of the evening, however.

But the second lecture, on Théophile Gautier, was no more of a success. When Baudelaire began to speak, there were hardly more than twenty people scattered about the front rows of the huge room, and many of these, even, disappeared during the introduction. Soon only two or three people remained, says Camille Lemonnier ; attendants, perhaps, or members of the committee. The auditorium was a trough of darkness, at the bottom of which, in

a patch of brilliant lamp-light, Baudelaire, in evening dress and white tie, seemed to be delivering a useless sermon into the void. His thin voice, with its incisive intonations, resounded weirdly through the vast room, so that certain words called forth derisive echoes from the vaulted roof. The poet, however, appeared not to notice these desertions, this lack of people, and when he had finished he made three correct bows, as though he were confronted by a considerable audience. But, who can say, perhaps at that moment his mind was conjuring up the crowds who, in later generations, would eagerly stoop over his books to acquire the lessons of his harsh experience.

Finally, the third lecture, on the *Paradis artificiels*, having taken place on May 23rd, in the same deserted room, the committee of the Circle decided to put an end to the expense. These gentlemen sent a porter to Baudelaire with one hundred francs instead of the three hundred due to him. Yet still faithful, in spite of his age, to his old habits of a young man of property, always preoccupied with appearing to his family in an advantageous light, the poet wrote to his mother and his trustee that his lectures had met with an unprecedented success, but that, as the season was too far advanced, he had only been able to lecture five times (which was not even true) and that as to the settlement of the price agreed upon, they had not kept their word (which seems to be partly true).

It is very rare for those who have met with a reverse not to contrive to find the explanation outside the affair in which they were personally concerned, in circumstances unconnected with the experience itself. Here, however, the reason for the failure is simple : except for a few writers, who in any case did not put themselves out at all, the author of the *Fleurs du Mal* was completely unknown in Belgium. On the other hand when, the following year, Dumas père came to Brussels, there was a rush to see him.

Real greatness does not always go hand in hand with notoriety, that is all.

But Baudelaire liked to delude himself. In his case a quite excusable weakness; reality had treated him so roughly. Each time it weighed upon him afresh, he instinctively sought a way out in dreams or myths. This time it pleased him to imagine that the people of Brussels had held aloof from his lectures because some one had started the rumour that he was a spy in the pay of the French police. And, naturally, the author of this infamy was someone in Victor Hugo's set!

To counteract the effect of this vile slander, the poet accepted the gracious proposal of Prosper Crabbe, a stock-broker and collector, who put his mansion at his disposal so that he might give a private lecture.

And the party, in fact, took place; "Enough to make you die of laughing," Baudelaire declared, but there was a note of despair in his laughter. "Three huge rooms lit up with chandeliers and candelabras, hung with superb pictures, and an absurd profusion of cakes and wine; all this for ten or twelve *very depressed* people." A journalist hovered round him and said, "There is something christian in your work that has not received sufficient attention." (In parenthesis, this Belgian was quite intelligent.) But a murmur arose from the "stock-exchange sofa" at the other end of the room. These gentlemen whispered angrily to each other: "He says we are fools!" However, the lecture began. . . . At the end of ten minutes, seeing that he was boring everybody, the poet got up and said: "Let's leave it at that!" and began to eat and drink. His friends, of whom there were five present, were ashamed and distressed. Only Baudelaire laughed, and laughed . . .

Not content with having made fun of everybody on this occasion, he wanted to go one better. O, so that was it! They were making infamous accusations against him?

Well then, he would take a delight in dirtying his reputation in an even more ignominious way ! He would say that he was a " pederast." How times have changed ! To-day such an announcement would immediately procure him a following.

But soon he suffered a fresh set-back of another kind : he had never thought of the lectures, at least so he asserts, as the principle aim of his visit. He had come to Brussels, above all, in the hope of concluding an agreement for publishing his critical works with Lacroix and Verboeckhoven. But though Baudelaire invited Lacroix to his lectures six times, the latter did not even excuse himself for not going. It was Verboeckhoven who undertook to send the poet the two partners' reply, after they had considered his offer : it was a refusal.

Some time later, when Lacroix was standing as a Deputy, Baudelaire joined in with his opponents at a club. For three hours, he said, he enjoyed the low pleasure of hooting the publisher who had refused him. Such a childish trick is astonishing in a man of forty-three, as a rule so serious, but at the same time, one cannot help seeing some connection between the anonymity of this puerile vengeance and those unsigned articles in which, several times in the course of his career, the poet gave rein to his ill-humour. It was a trait of his character.

And yet, Baudelaire's nervous instability is not sufficient to explain the almost spasmodic revulsion, the real nausea that he felt from this time on for everything Belgian. There is every reason to believe that this violent antipathy originated in a feeling of contempt, or rather, that here the mental agitation was the unreasoning, delirious manifestation of a profound disappointment.

Certainly, the poet declared, the French were stupid, and it was on this account that he wanted to escape from them,

but the Belgians were even more stupid. What would he not have given, now, for a drink with a sailor, or even a criminal, in an inn at Honfleur, provided they were not Belgians! Everything in Brussels was repulsive to him, except the wine: the bread was nasty, the meat badly cooked, the beer detestable, the trees black and the flowers had no scent. It was winter, but there was not even the poor consolation of an open fire, for here they hid their fires in stoves. "You may judge," Baudelaire wrote to Ancelle, "you may judge what I suffer—I, who first got to know sea and sky at Bordeaux and Bourbon, Mauritius and Calcutta. . . ." Why did he still lie? He had never been to Calcutta.

But at last he had found a way to avenge himself; he would write a book: *Belgium Undressed.* He had already written several chapters, he said; but it was not true. It was so difficult, not to think out a book, but to write it, without wearying of it; that is, to have courage *every day!* So, in the meantime, to document himself about the country (was not this indispensable before beginning to write?), he would visit Antwerp, which he found superb, with the fine, solemn atmosphere of an old capital, enhanced by the magnificent river; and Malines (where he was the guest of Rops), which enchanted him with its churches, its lawns, its devout quietness and the continual music of its chimes. Rops, he said, was a mad sort of fellow and horribly provincial, but all the same the only true artist he had met in Belgium.

As to the French in Brussels, there were, to begin with, those who were just passing through: first of all Nadar, always gay, with a prodigious vitality, who had come to give the Belgians an exhibition of a balloon ascent. The airman even politely offered Baudelaire a place in the basket, and for a moment the poet was delighted with the

proposition : " To escape from this beastly people in a balloon, and to come down in Austria or Turkey perhaps ! . . . " What a temptation ! But the " Giant " rose into the air taking only Nadar, while Baudelaire, with slow steps and bowed head, returned to the hôtel du Grand-Miroir, where the landlady, spying from behind the office-window, watched him come in, with an already suspicious glance.

On another occasion Monselet arrived, rotund and smiling and a bit short-winded, only to leave again a little later, having seen nothing of Antwerp but a huge grill that he had specially crossed the Schelde to eat.

So everyone goes to meet his fate ! There are some whose fame is confined to a reputation as a gourmet, together with the merit of having wittily sung the praises of *The Lobster* and *The Pig* ; and, perhaps, they are happy. But would Baudelaire have exchanged his cruel lot for so futile a happiness ? Or would he, ignored and flouted and ill, have bartered his name for Nadar's, that name proclaimed by every hoarding, that sonorous name which, one Sunday, was on every tongue throughout the holiday-making town ?

Yet at Brussels the poet found one real friend : " Coco," an exile like himself, who having gone bankrupt, had come to live in Belgium and traffic in obscene books ! True, there was nothing very noble, very high-minded in all this ; it does not suggest a rigid inflexibility of principle. Admittedly " Coco " was a cynic, but for all that he was a good fellow ! Kindness is not always coupled with notions of honour, which is very regrettable, but the human soul is so varied ! And then, whatever one may say of Poulet-Malassis, if he had not been there in 1856, would Baudelaire ever have found another publisher willing to print the *Fleurs du Mal ?* It is most uncertain. And the proof is that, since his friend's misfortune, wherever the poet had presented himself, in top-hat and Inverness cape, with a

manuscript under his arm, he had only been met with a wooden stare.

After the famous " upset," the poet and his publisher had quarreled slightly. The accounts were not wound up without a certain amount of squabbling. . . . But brought together once more by chance in the same town and in a foreign country, how could they continue to sulk ? Could such a thing be permitted between two old friends like them, two " veterans of '48 "—for this also counted for something. It was useless for Poulet-Malassis, the Voltairean, to find that Baudelaire was turning into a " parson," or for Baudelaire to think that " Coco's " atheism was only another of his vulgarities : they had once been in the street-fighting on the same side of the barricades, and such things can never be forgotten. And, besides, even during the time of their estrangement, Malassis had shown the kindness of his heart, for never, in spite of his own difficulties, had he thought of transferring an old bill that he had upon Baudelaire for five thousand francs, for fear the assignee should afterwards annoy his friend. And how many disciplinarians are there who would have behaved as well ?

So Baudelaire and Malassis were reconciled. They had shaken hands. But the hôtel du Grand-Miroir was situated in the centre of the town, in the rue de la Montagne, and Malassis lived in the Faubourg d'Ixelles, miles from anywhere, so that the friends saw but little of each other.

Baudelaire felt even more lonely, more deserted, than at the hôtel de Dieppe. Sometimes he used to go to spend the evening at the Prince of Wales, an inn frequented by a few French political exiles : Ranc and Deschanel, an old school-fellow at Louis-le-Grand. Sometimes he would receive a visit from Thoré, another companion of earlier days, of the time of the barricades. Thoré, who was also a political exile, had not chosen to take advantage of the

amnesty of 1859, but " although a republican, his manners were refined." It was a great pleasure to the poet to renew his acquaintance with him. And, in any case, he was in a mood to consider every Frenchman a genius.

Save Victor Hugo, of course ! Or rather, no ; on the contrary he recognised Hugo's " special genius," but by a strange phenomenon this man of genius was at the same time " a fool." And by the bye, this particular kind of fool was coming to live at Brussels. " Either he has not had the strength to stand the Ocean, or the Ocean itself is sick of him." However, the great poet bought a house in the rue de l'Astronomie, in the Léopold district, and arrived soon after ; not without a considerable stir, for when a Victor Hugo moves, he displaces more air than a Baudelaire.

The latter was several times invited to dinner by Mme. Adèle Victor Hugo. He accepted, but only to return from these evenings filled with an abusive irritation : Mme. Hugo was " half an idiot." She and her sons, Charles and François-Victor, at that time had a new fad ; a monumental plan for international education. Fortunately Mme. Charles Hugo was a musician. After dinner Baudelaire used to ask her to play the piano. " Now," he would say, " let us have a few of Wagner's noble chords " ! It was the consecrated formula. The young woman used to perform with a good grace. She would open the score of *Tannhäuser* and play the Pilgrim's Chorus, the March of the Knights and Elizabeth's Prayer. Another evening Baudelaire drew Mme. Adèle Hugo into a corner of the room and, urged on by his demon of perversity, spoke to her for a long time about Sainte-Beuve. . . . Later it would appear, Baudelaire repented of the coarse way he had judged Adèle, for Mme. Victor Hugo, hearing that he was ill, sent her doctor to him ; from that day on she was, decidedly, a good woman.

As for the old master himself, he had just published his

Chansons des rues et des bois. "An enormous success from the point of view of sales : for all intelligent people a disappointment. He wanted, this time, to be joyous and light-hearted and amorous, and to be young again. It is terribly heavy." And to whom did Baudelaire write this ? To his mother. So one must know how to read between the lines. As for example : "Sacré Sainte-Ciboire ! But this Hugo is powerful all the same, his books sell, he has a glorious name, and he is a poet like me ! My mother must draw comparisons between us—she, who believes like all mothers, that a work is of no value save in so far as it is a success. So I shall say nothing about Victor Hugo that I do not think, but I shall say it in a certain way ; and above all, I shall only say part of what I think. There are two things amongst others that I shall not mention : the first is, that Victor Hugo's prolificness, the regularity and diversity of his production, astound me ; the second, which I keep even more secret, which I don't even admit to Gautier and Sainte-Beuve, is that I, a workman in verse, I, a technician, cannot help feeling an immense admiration for the craftsmanship of this great man."

CHAPTER SIX

The Approach of Darkness

Vainement ma raison voulait prendre la barre.

But what had become of Baudelaire? He had gone away for a month and had not come back, though it would soon be a year since he had left Paris. His friends did not know what to make of it. They had heard from Nadar and Monselet that the lectures had been a frost. But the lectures had taken place a long while before; what had Baudelaire been doing in the meantime? What could have been keeping him in Belgium? It was a mystery.

From Brussels, Baudelaire sent Manet scolding exhortations. For it can be truly said that he recognised, in his time, all the precursors, all the future leaders of schools. Manet, indeed, had not the range of a Delacroix or a Wagner; he was only "leader in the decrepitude of his art;" but what he chiefly lacked was force of character, the unshakeable faith of the great painter and the great composer. They certainly suffered, knowing that they were not understood, but yet nothing could dishearten them, whilst Manet gave way to doubt and despondency. And it was for that reason that Baudelaire, far away, chided him, rather in the way that he was preaching to himself.

The artist showed these letters from the poet to Mme. Paul Meurice, their common friend, a charming, intelligent, witty and coquettish woman whom Baudelaire had met at *la Présidente's*, and who, in his opinion, had only one defect, that of having "fallen into democracy like a butterfly into gelatine."

Every fortnight, on Saturdays, she used to give a musical evening. She would wear her Robin Hood gown, trimmed

with cornelians and fitting tightly to the figure, or her green taffeta dress with its *incroyable* jacket, and her hair piled on the top of her head, with curls falling on her forehead, leaving her ears and neck uncovered. She and Mme. Manet, who played the piano like two angels, took their place in turn on the revolving stool, spreading out their skirts before they sat down. Chérubin-Astruc, rather conceited about his fine voice, used to sing. Among the guests would be Fantin (this gathering was like one of his pictures), Fantin whose god in music was Schumann ; Bracquemond, who adored Beethoven ; Champfleury, who was devoted to Händel ; and lastly Manet, whose special favourite was Haydn. But, when tea was served, it would be rare if someone in this fervent little group did not ask the question that they had all asked so many times in these last months ; "And what about Baudelaire, what is he doing in Brussels ? "

Nor did Sainte-Beuve know what to make of this prolonged absence. He had lately been elected Senator and his " dear child " had written to congratulate him. Through Baudelaire he had learnt that Malassis's new business (in which Beuve was interested as a bibliophile), had got poor " Coco " prosecuted for offences against public decency, a miscalculation and a disgrace that in no way affected his incorrigible cheerfulness. But why did Baudelaire himself not return to France ? And since he was the first person to insist that the atmosphere of Paris, its theatres, its crowds, its bands and even its street lamps, was necessary to him in order to finish his *Poèmes en prose*, why did he not take the train at once ?

And besides, it is always wrong for a writer to be absent long. That is the way to be forgotten. Sainte-Beuve had pointed out this danger to the poet, and there was now a good opportunity for Baudelaire to assume the leadership of the new school. What, indeed, the newcomers lacked, these writers who called themselves " Parnassians," was a

" relative tradition " and a chief. If Baudelaire were there, he would become, whether he liked it or not, " an authority, an oracle, a consulting poet." Now the singular and inexplicable thing was, that this proud, ambitious man made no response at all to these appeals. To what was such indifference, such apathy, due ? Troubat, *fidus Troubates*, Sainte-Beuve's devoted secretary, returned to the attack, and drew this reply upon himself : " These young men do not lack talent, certainly, but what absurdities, what carelessness, what exaggerations ! . . . I like nothing so much as to be alone."

There was one of these young men, however, who had contributed to *l'Art*, the Parnassian review run by L. Xavier de Ricard, three long and enthusiastic articles on *Les Fleurs du Mal.* Mendès, the principal editor, had sent these articles to Baudelaire, with the remark that he had pointed out the judgments to be expressed but that he had been unable to combat the faults of writing, which were an eccentricity of the author's. This is amusing when one realises that the author of these articles was Paul Verlaine.

But, though one may smile at the simple vanity of the well-meaning Catulle, there is a certain sadness in the reflection that Verlaine's study had already come too late, too late for Baudelaire's intelligence, in the midst of his torments, to attribute to this homage the importance it merited ; too late, also, for his embittered feelings to derive any consolation from it. It is a painful truth that everything is woven and unwoven, prepared and undone in the mysteriousness and confusion of an eternal misunderstanding. When Wagner met Baudelaire, can one think that he perceived for a moment what sort of man he had to deal with ? For him, Baudelaire was a young admirer among many others, nothing more. And, now, in his turn, a little clerk in the Hôtel de Ville, whose grammar was shaky, had

written an article on Baudelaire's work which Mendès, a better grammarian, had almost refused, considering it too careless ; and this unassuming and singular clerk, with the features of a faun, whose breath smelt of absinthe, was once again the poet in the company of versifiers, looked on by them as one of their own kind ; the inspired poet, the *vates*, once more unsuspected, the star which rises when the other sinks ; in fact, the successor.

But now for Baudelaire, the rhythm of time was no longer the same as it was for his friends, and that was why for some months they had been astonished, but had not understood. This discrepancy had not come about at any particular moment, but by unnoticeable degrees. At first the condemned man had no notion of the change. After long periods of lethargy he roused himself, suddenly threw a look at the calendar, and saw with terror that weeks had passed. Then, in great uneasiness, he tried to recapture the time that was lost, to put in order, so to speak, his feelings, his ideas and his affairs.

With sudden lucidity, as if in a flash of lightning, he remembered that Jeanne had written to tell him she had gone blind ; he pitied her, became alarmed, and implored Ancelle to send the unfortunate woman some money on his behalf ; or else in haste wrote to the people in France in whose hands he had placed his affairs : Commander Lejosne, and afterwards Julien Lemer. For the poet was still trying to find a publisher. Before leaving Paris, he had signed an agreement with Hetzel, valid for a period of five years, which required the publication of a new edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* and of an unpublished work : *Le Spleen de Paris* (the *Poèmes en prose*). Hetzel now became impatient and called upon the author to deliver the manuscript of *Le Spleen de Paris*, but the poet could not succeed in finishing it. What Baudelaire desired, was to find a

serious publishing house which would agree to issue, not merely two of his books, but his complete works.

Now that his terrible headaches had ceased, he blamed his agents for their slowness, and said that he was surprised at their negligence. What were the Garnier brothers, whom Lemer had approached, waiting for before they decided ? At least let them give an answer. But one had to take care. Hippolyte was " the real head," Auguste was " just the brother." It was Hippolyte who had to be won over.

Or else, feverishly, he sketched out the plan of a letter which was to be a retort to the attack opened by Jules Janin, in *l'Indépendance belge*, against Heinrich Heine and Byron : " You are a happy man. I pity you, sir, for being happy so easily. A man must have sunk pretty low to think himself happy ! . . . "

Then, once more, his neuralgia returned and all relations with the outside world were broken off ; it was one more step towards the region of absolute isolation. Baudelaire had sunk into that " state of stupor " which, he said, made him suspect his own faculties. For days he did not go out at all. When Malassis went to see him, he found him in bed, his head wrapped up in a damp cloth. " Coco " roared at this spectacle, then talked cheerfully and with vigour about his prosecution. Baudelaire hardly answered and soon, so as not to tire him, " Coco " went away, still laughing.

But down there, in her " doll's house," Baudelaire's mother felt sad presentiments ; for this suffering flesh, this struggling soul was a part of herself. She did not cease to implore her son to " come back." And he, each time that the mists, gathering round his brain, cleared, answered : " I will leave next month, I must finish my book on Belgium here." And next month : " I will leave in a few days." But the winter came to an end, spring passed

and Baudelaire was still in Brussels. At the hotel, whenever he saw a traveller's luggage being put on a cab, he thought : " There is a happy man, he can go away." But Baudelaire stayed on. To Ancelle, he wrote : " I am doing penance. . . . It is a matter of books to finish and books to be sold which will ensure me a few months peace in France." These were bad reasons : of his spiteful work on Belgium, which he had said was well in hand, he had written nothing except a few outrageous thoughts jotted down in a note-book ; and as for the question of selling his works, it was in France itself that the affair was being discussed.

The true explanation of this prolonged stay in Brussels must be sought for in the mental state, and in the emotion associated with that state, which had motivated his departure from Paris : Paris terrified him. Baudelaire did not even dare to speak the name of Arondel, who was still threatening him, but referred to him as " the creditor I am so afraid of."

One day, however, he felt better and decided to leave. He had arranged a meeting in Paris with Michel Lévy and many others, and he trembled with joy to think that afterwards he would go on to Honfleur to kiss his dear mother. But suddenly, at the booking-office, terror seized him, the dread of seeing *his hell* again, of having to pass through Paris without the certainty of being able to distribute a large sum of money among his creditors. He went back to his hotel.

Towards the end of June 1865 his suffering diminished. There was a halt, a remission as the doctors say, in the progress of the disease. The poet took the train, and on the 4th July was in Paris, at the hôtel du Chemin du Fer du Nord, Place du Nord. In his drab, low-ceilinged room, he listened to the dull murmur of the great city, and to that continual ringing of hoofs which had so often echoed

in his skull, as if it were the very hammering of his cruel cares.

On the 7th July he was at Honfleur, seeing once again the little house on the cliffs, the beds of petunias, his bedroom with the view over the blue-grey Channel, with the drawings of Guys, the etchings of Méryon and Whistler's water-colour on the walls, above all, he found once more the great love of his life, his old mother. They embraced one another and for a long time wept in each other's arms.

The next morning Madame Aupick noticed that her son was sad and preoccupied. She made him sit down on a bench in the garden, questioned him, confessed him. He admitted that he was tormented by his debt to Malassis ; the creditor, his own friend, was himself without resources. Then, yet again, Madame Aupick bemoaned her lot, and yet again she robbed herself : she paid.

Immediately, relieved of this great burden, on the 9th July, barely forty-eight hours after he had arrived, Baudelaire found it tedious there and decided to go away. " I will come back soon." The same evening he was in Paris at the hôtel du Nord.

He stayed there six days that were, unknown to him, six days " filled with farewells." He had an interview with Hippolyte Garnier, another with Julien Lemer, he drank a *bock* in the rue Royale with Troubat, and spent a whole afternoon with Asselineau and Banville. His friends found him in good fettle, his eyes bright, his voice clear and full, his manner gay. Perhaps he was a bit heavier in body, but beer is fattening and Baudelaire had just come from the land of beer.

What was incomprehensible though, was his obstinate determination to go back there. On July 11th, indeed, he wrote to Sainte-Beuve, " I am leaving for hell again . . ." ; but, if he left, it was because Paris, where he did not feel safe, where at every street-corner he feared he would

meet one of his creditors, seemed to him an even more dreadful hell. And besides, there was his study of Belgian manners, still on the stocks. . . .

On July 16th Baudelaire was back at the hôtel du Grand-Miroir, in his " all-white " room, freezing, he said, even in summer. Like a fox hurt to death, he had got back to his earth, far from Arondel and the others.

And weeks and months again went by. Garnier, in the end, had refused the poet's offers. He, far off, turned to Ancelle and with a movement full of excuses for the past, full of supplication, too, under the blows of the present which beat him down, cried out to his trustee : " Make yourself into a literary agent, for my sake." Ancelle, only too delighted by this mark of confidence, immediately began proceedings.

And now, for the first time in his life, this lovable but difficult man with whom he had had to struggle so much, sent him congratulations : " A thousand thanks for all your zeal, you got out of it much better than I would have believed." Another day he wrote that he was ashamed of all the bother he was giving " his dear Ancelle," and the old man was moved, overcome. He was enchanted, too, to have resumed by letter their former conversations : and also scandalised and supremely excited (he, who was so respectful to all official fame, and so balanced in his judgments) by violence like this : " Except for Chateaubriand, Balzac, Stendhal, Mérimée, Vigny, Flaubert, Banville, Gautier, and Leconte de Lisle, all the modern riff-raff horrifies me. Virtue is horrible. Vice is horrible. The fluent style is horrible. Progress is horrible. Don't ever talk to me any more about these nonsense-mongers."

Beginning in December 1865 the attacks became more frequent and each time more acute. The form they took was the following (Baudelaire himself has described it) :

he would be feeling perfectly well, before breakfast, when suddenly without warning or any apparent cause, he would feel uncertain, distracted and stupefied, with a terrible pain in the head and, unless he happened to be lying down at the moment, he would fall, clutching at the furniture and bringing it down with him. This would be followed by a cold sweat, vomitings of bile or white foam, and complete prostration. The doctor pronounced the word " hysteria " and prescribed pills for the neuralgia (made of quinine, digitalis, belladonna and morphine) and for the giddiness, Vichy water, valerian, ether, Pulna water.

In an interval between two attacks the poet sent to his " dear, good little mother," for the New Year of 1866, some cruets in old Rouen pottery. He wrote to her : " I see you in your sitting room or your drawing room, working, going about, active, grumbling and reproaching me from the distance . . . " Or again : " My books are *dormant*, money wasted for the present ; and then, I am being forgotten . . . "

At his hotel, he now owed several hundreds of francs. It was always the same spiral of torments in which he revolved, sinking deeper and deeper : the descent into the maëlstrom.

The landlady, by an inevitable progression, had become in turn " the unbearable landlady," then " that bitch," then " the monster at the Grand-Miroir." With this woman who watched his post in expectation of a registered letter, he had abominable scenes, and for this reason he asked Ancelle to address his letters to the post-office. He used to go there to fetch them with his head wrapped in a sort of turban soaked in sedative water and turpentine. This strange head-dress created a scandal in the street and even in the court-yard of the Grand-Miroir.

Once in his room, with the door locked, he could breathe a little. In bed his head was heavy but he felt him-

self in safety. He tried to avoid thinking about that "cursed woman," but unfortunately did not always succeed. Sometimes, the ghosts of all the landladies who had tormented him during his life surrounded him like furies; caracoling around him like witches on broom-sticks, in an endless orgy that made one laugh and shudder at the same time. But what was the time? It was impossible to find out. There was no clock in the room and his watch was in pawn. . . . How slow dawn was in coming. Why didn't his mother send her portrait as he had asked her to so often. . . . Or again, he would say to himself: "Come, let us think about this. If this is apoplexy or paralysis which is coming on, what shall I do, and how shall I put my affairs in order?" And then, straining his ears for a long while, he would try, at the cost of infinite weariness, to catch in their flight, from the distance, the indistinct striking of the clocks. . . .

So, one morning in March 1866, after a terrible night, he suddenly felt his head clear, completely unconstrained; an extraordinary joy flooded his heart, like a stream long dammed-up which rushes into a lock. It was another kind of giddiness, but a happy one, a sudden multiplication of all his powers. He dreamed indistinctly and at the same time of his beloved mother, of poor Jeanne, of the good Ancelle, in a confused transport of his whole being, in which love, pity and repentance mingled and made up one single emotion, very pure, lofty and calm; that of a vast pardon, a universal absolution. He wrote in his note-book: "Is my phase of egotism at an end?—My humiliations have been God's grace.—Without charity I am only a tinkling cymbal."

Lord, through how many circles of trial and tribulation, of faults severely expiated, had your creature to pass in order to put off the old man! How many passions he had

first to exhaust : passions of ambition, passions of pleasure, lusts of the soul and of the flesh, before arriving at this great peace ! And you, the naturally virtuous souls, if any such really exist on earth, how feeble your simple virtue seems compared with this contested virtue, snatched, all bleeding, after a long struggle, from the horde of evil instincts !

If now, in this moment of respite, on the threshold of the last journey, one examines Baudelaire's completed existence, in a fore-shortened view, it will appear that everything had really conspired to test and to chasten this pure poet, as he himself purified his style, as he cleared it of all the dross ; first of all that harsh, libidinous nature he had inherited, and which was his first curse, that debilitated and violent disposition, continually swinging between two extremes ; later, mistakes and excesses that were never gratuitous, I mean never without consequences, but which always rigorously and implacably unrolled the chain of their effects ; and lastly, the series of quarrels, of which one will never know what proportion ought to be attributed to the character of him who suffered from them, to his too marked *originality*, and what to the incomprehension of his contemporaries.

The work of Baudelaire, alone, whatever its sad beauty, will not suffice to explain the almost personal, intimate attachment that all writers worthy of the name feel towards the memory of the poet. We must, to account for this fervour, bring forward another reason, the fact that Baudelaire was, during his life-time, the very type of the superior and unfortunate writer. But why, in this argument, should his magnificent work be placed on one side, and his unhappy life on the other ? Neither can be separated from the other, as we have said. Baudelaire called *Les Fleurs du Mal* "this terrible book." What could he have meant by this except that it was his destiny itself which was terrible, and that he had condensed its signifi-

cance, day by day, into those musical pages ? Platitudes, miseries, vices, exhaltations, relapses, ecstacies and agonies and all these experienced, more even, living and breathing : the merciless reality alone, as objective and often as literal as a bailiff's writ, but at the same time, through the enchantment of a supreme art, become rich in resonances, prolongations and echoes.

Let us pass on. The time was soon to come when all these apparent disorders were to disappear in that supreme order, the masterpiece that remained though soon the man would be no more. All the sorrows of this ill-regulated life were to find their justification after all ; they had worked together for the purification of a soul and the composition of a great book. Baudelaire, in those first gloomy months of 1866, found himself rebuffed by the publishers, all doors one after another were shut in his face, but at that moment, even, there was one that turned on its hinges to make way for him, the gate of immortality.

At this time the poet was almost forty-five years old. But how much he had suffered ! The skin of his face was like the surface of a worn road ; on the brow, round the eyes, were deep furrows, ploughed by the wheels of passion. All his features had an aridity that was a sad contrast to the intensity of the eyes and, above all, there was that contraction of the lips, as of one who had for a long while been used to taste only ashes on his tongue.

Forty-five years old ! But it is chiefly to us, since we now see him in relation to his work, that Baudelaire has the appearance of an old man. Yes, it is well that we know the date of his birth ; for in calculating his age, such is the mass of experience with which his work is filled, we should never imagine that he died when he was only what might be called " still a young man."

Yet it was destined that even till the end, even till that

morning when he attained the heights of perfect contrition, the poet should not cease to be the dupe of deceptive hope. Alas, he took the sensation of serenity which had suddenly flooded him, for a fresh lease of youth! In a moment the distant years were brought close to the present moment, as though the time that had passed in the interval was altogether abolished.

Outside, the sky was blue, the sun shone as it used to do on the poplars of the Ile Saint-Louis, as it had on the Montsouris shrubberies. Baudelaire opened his window. A mild breeze filled the room, sweeping away the smells of medicine and the last mists of the night. A bell pealed with the same tone as the bell of Saint-Séverin's, when in the rue Saint-André-des-Arts, he used to listen to its chiming on fine Sundays. A tree under the window showed the red tips of its budding leaves, as, once upon a time, the chestnut trees of the Luxembourg had shown their impatience by breaking out in those same purple buds. How early winter had ended, that year! It was splendid weather for an outing.

As it happened, the father-in-law of his friend Rops, "the only man in Belgium who knows Latin and has the manner of a Frenchman," had invited the poet to spend a few days with him at Namur. Rapidly but with great care, like a lover who is in a hurry to keep an appointment he has been looking forward to for a long time, Baudelaire made his toilet, polished his nails, washed his long grey hair and brushed it over the back of his head, "which gave him the look of an academician abroad." Then he put on his broad-brimmed top hat, went whistling down stairs and in passing threw the proprietress an indulgent glance, accompanied with a little wave of his hand. On the pavement he hailed a cab: "The station, cabby." Namur! it was essential for his book that he should have another look at the town! *Sacré Saint-Ciboire!*

CHAPTER SEVEN

The End

O Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps, levons l'ancre.

What is the use of dwelling on what followed ? Here are the facts. At Namur, in the church of Saint-Loup, which he visited with Félicien Rops and Malassis, who had come to join him, Baudelaire was seized with dizziness. He stumbled and fell. His foot, he said, had slipped. But next day he showed signs of mental confusion. He was taken back to Brussels, his right side paralysed, his speech already muddled. He was still able to dictate short notes, however, and even in one of them, that he sent on March 29th 1866 to Prarond, his old friend of the Pension Bailly and the École Normale, to thank him for the gift of his *Airs de flûte*, he pointed out a false rhythm. But in eight days his difficulty of speech had noticeably increased. Malassis informed Ancelle, Asselineau and Troubat.

Ancelle arrived shortly afterwards, still assiduous, still devoted, deeply affected. Baudelaire was moved to a private hospital kept by some nuns. He was rapidly losing his faculties. Madame Aupick, too, was informed by Ancelle, with all the circumspection possible. She was then a woman of seventy-three and quite infirm, but she was not to be deterred by that. With her maid Aimée, she took the train to Brussels. At the sight of her son, her sorrow broke out. Malassis mingled his tears with hers. " What an excellent young man," she said, " How good he is ! This young man must have a beautiful soul."

At the end of two weeks, as the nuns were scandalised by Baudelaire's swearing, the invalid was taken back to the hôtel du Grand-Miroir, where his mother took a room near him. When the weather was good he drove out in a carriage

with Mme. Aupick and Stevens. He sometimes even walked, leaning on a stick. One day " Coco " took him out to lunch in the country. But the unfortunate man had almost lost the use of speech. Sometimes he exasperated himself by useless attempts to pronounce a word, sometimes he had bursts of hilarity which terrified his mother. " That brain," she said, " has done too much work." Such an admission on the part of the old lady, might seem the expression of a belated repentance. Had not Baudelaire always been unappreciated by his own relatives ? But no, in spite of her great age and in spite of her grief, Caroline remained too shallow for such self-examination.

At the beginning of July the invalid was brought back to Paris. Mme. Aupick accompanied him, helped by Aimée, and the party was joined by Arthur Stevens. Asselineau, who came to the Gare du Nord to meet his friend, saw him at a distance in the crowd, supporting himself against Arthur Stevens with his left arm, his right hanging limply at his side, his cane hooked on to a button of his coat. The paralytic, in his turn, recognised him. He gave a sonorous, sharp, prolonged laugh, that froze Asselineau's heart.

After some time spent in a hotel, Baudelaire, on July 14th, was transferred with the help of Ancelle to a nursing-home at Chaillot, under the supervision of a doctor Émile Duval, in the rue du Dôme. Mme. Sabatier, Léon Cladel, Champfleury, Manet and his wife, and others, sadly hurried to see him. Mme. Meurice obtained permission to play fragments from *Tannhäuser* in the sick man's room. Nadar, once or twice during the autumn, even had the strange idea of taking Baudelaire out to dine with him and a few intimate friends at his house. And the most astonishing thing is that the doctor permitted these outings.

For several months the disease remained stationary. But his aphasia prevented him getting any further than the

words : *Non, cré nom, non.* Poulet-Malassis, replying from Brussels to Asselineau, who had sent him news of their poor friend, quoted this profound remark from Trousseau : " When you see an aphasic who appears to be still in possession of his intelligence, though he has lost the faculty of expressing himself, remember how many times you have said of certain animals, that they lack nothing but the power of speech."

Nothing is more true. If Baudelaire's early biographers thought themselves called upon to dwell at length on this year of agony, it was doubtless because it did not seem to them absurd that the poet's friends could still, even at that date, entertain some hope. But to-day, when we know for certain that, in the present state of medicine, once general paralysis has declared itself it is incurable, the history of the months that followed the fatal stroke offers no kind of interest. This progressive breaking-up of a powerful mind is so sad, so revolting and repulsive, that our only concern is to have done with it. From the legal point of view Baudelaire still lived for some time, but in reality he was already dead : he had been struck down at Namur, in the church of Saint-Loup. After the spring of 1867 the invalid never left his bed. At last on August 31st of the same year, all that was left of the man that had been Baudelaire, this paralytic frothing at the mouth, this pitiful rag of humanity, breathed his last.

Then the grimacing mask fell aside, and, suddenly, for a few hours, the poet's face was once more seen, purified, triumphant, and at peace.

Mme. Aupick's grief was immense : she had lost the son whom she idolised, as she said with that shade of exaggeration she always had, and which once used to make Charles smile. But Caroline was still Caroline, even at seventy-four. In spite of her terrible loss, she was still flattered by the visits she received, by the sympathy that was

shown her, by the rumour of the fame that was arising around the name of her child.

Ancelle went to the registrar's to notify the death, and took upon himself all the business connected with the funeral. He, too, was still the same: busy, obliging, punctual, meddling, solemn and talkative. But his eyes were red and his face was swollen, as if it had been boiled. It was because he had been crying when he was alone, in the cab.

The funeral service was celebrated on Monday, 2nd September, at the church of Saint-Honoré, at Passy, in the presence of some hundred men of letters and friends, at most. The burial took place at the Montparnasse cemetery, in the family vault. A few of his admirers only, among them Paul Verlaine, Fantin and Manet, followed the coffin to the cemetery, for the heat was overpowering. The Authors' Society had not sent a single member of its committee, nor was the Government represented. Banville spoke very nobly by the grave-side; in Baudelaire he hailed the *innovator*, the man, he said, who had not transfigured human nature in the image of a preconceived idea, but who had "accepted modern man as a whole, with his faults, his unhealthy charm and his powerless aspirations." After that Asselineau, filled with indignation and furious that so few people were present, payed homage to his private life, that had been too often slandered.

The papers either took no notice or were disdainful. There was only one respectful article, that by Auguste Vitu in the *Etendard*.

In the Goncourt's *Journal*, there is nothing under this date. Sixteen months later, on January 12th, 1869, there is this entry: "The extravagances of an artist or a writer—for instance, Baudelaire or Méryon—cause them to be overrated once they are dead; it sends up the price of their books, as the guillotine sends up the price of specimens of criminal's handwriting, in the catalogues of autographs."

This is certainly what is called a picturesque, amusing, witty *thrust*, but how often the Goncourts, in their famous *Journal*, have mistaken such thrusts for judgments! It is worth noticing the information contained in this piece of malice: two years after the death of the poet, the quotation for Baudelaire on the Literary Stock Exchange had already gone up.

Mme. Aupick returned to Honfleur. What she had heard said of her son after his death, had entirely modified her opinion of him. But she had loved him so much, that never for an instant did she think that perhaps she had loved him without understanding him: she thought she had always understood him.

Sainte-Beuve wrote a touching, unctuous letter to the unhappy mother, which doubtless in his own eyes excused him from writing an article. The great critic's praise, this short low mass, had the effect of increasing Mme. Aupick's pride and her tearful pleasure. "The poor woman," Asselineau wrote to Malassis, "came to us full of prejudices against her son which had been instilled by a crowd of artillery officers, friends of her husband's, amongst whom she lived at Honfleur. But . . . Sainte-Beuve's letter has removed them. . . ."

Caroline lived on for some years, vowing not only to the memory of her son, but also to the work he had left behind, an absolute and enthusiastic devotion. In memory of her son, she generously distributed amongst his friends the pictures, drawings and engravings that hung in his room at Honfleur, a small personal collection which, if sold to-day, would produce a sum far greater than would have sufficed to free Baudelaire from all his pecuniary cares! There were pictures by Guys, Méryon and Rethel: a Boilly, a Legros, some Whistlers, some Manets, Jongkinds, Devérias and others besides.

When her son died Mme. Aupick made the acquaintance of Théodore de Banville's mother, and afterwards the two old women used to correspond.

On her side, Mme. de Banville made a cult of Théodore's genius, but her religion was not a posthumous one: this mother admired her son while he was still alive; she had always done so. Her thoughts, in the long run, had even become, as far as possible, identified with those of her favourite poet; and it is comical, yet touching, to observe what the shining optimism of a Banville and his tendency to idealise everything became, when transposed in the mind of an old lady.

Here is a passage from a letter in which Mme. de Banville describes for Mme. Aupick a visit she has just been paying to Baudelaire's tomb:

"My very dear Madame,

"My son and I have made our pious pilgrimage. The tomb of your adored son was lit up by the purple glow of an oriental sky, and it yet revealed the religious care that loving hands had taken for the embellishment of its transformation. . . . There was, in the atmosphere which surrounded this tomb, where all the glories meet together" (this was a delicate allusion to General Aupick), "something divine which perfumed this sacred neighbourhood. . . ."

In reality, there was a naked stone, surrounded by an iron railing. But does reality exist for anyone who sees an oriental sky above the Montparnasse cemetery?

Mme. Aupick died in her little house on the cliffs in 1871, aged seventy-eight all but a month. But Jeanne, Jeanne Duval, Jeanne Lemer, Jeanne Prosper, in short, Jeanne the negress, what became of her? Nadar is the last who claims to have seen anything of her, and that was towards 1870. She was walking, or rather dragging herself, along the boulevard, leaning on two crutches.

THE END